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ABSTRACT

This study investigated ways in which Australian vocational education and training (VET) students in the 1990s combined study and work to prepare for future long-term career paths. The study was conducted throughout 1998 in three technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in three states, using the following methods: a survey of about 1,400 students; interviews with about 50 students at each institute; a follow-up survey with other students; and meetings with staff for feedback on findings. The introductory survey indicated that males were focused in engineering and apprenticeships and tended to be more vocationally focused; females took courses in various areas. Despite contrasting circumstances, courses provided, and employment opportunities in the three regions, the majority of students regarded the study and work combination as a fact of life but saw little formal connection between the two. Their TAFEs and employers promoted this lack of formal connection as a fact of life. Many students reported involvement in paid and unpaid work as necessary to establishing a work record to complement their eventual training qualifications. Most students were in paid or unpaid employment and worked 2 or more days per week. Local staff and management personnel in the TAFEs were frustrated with the current system and were willing to rethink the role of VET. Current training arrangements still treated study and work as sequential rather than complementary elements of training and lagged behind student assessments of market demands. (Contains 13 references and 2 questionnaires.) (YLB)

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COMBINED STUDY AND WORK PATHS IN VET:

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Peter Dwyer, Aramiha Harwood,
Glen Costin, Mark Landy,
Lidia Towsty and Johanna Wyn

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COMBINED STUDY AND WORK PATHWAYS IN VET: POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND ANALYSIS

A project for NCVER undertaken in conjunction with University of Melbourne TAFE Collaboration (UMTC) and staff from three participating TAFE institutes

Peter Dwyer, Aramiha Harwood, Glen Costin, Mark Landy, Lidia Towsty and Johanna Wyn

JANUARY 1999
YOUTH RESEARCH CENTRE

Combined study and work pathways in vocational education training: Policy implications and analysis

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Acknowledgments

The founding charter of the Youth Research Centre (YRC) includes a commitment to support and promote other people's research on youth issues. It has become our common practice to develop collaborative research programs, and to provide the necessary co-ordination and support.

This Project was carried out in conjunction with the University of Melbourne TAFE Collaboration (UMTC). It enabled us to work with particular TAFE staff members – from Box Hill TAFE, Victoria, Riverina Institute of TAFE, New South Wales, and Regency Institute of TAFE, South Australia – who were responsible at the local level, in collaboration with the YRC Director. The work of the local researchers – Glenn Costin, Mark Landy and Lidia Towsty – was of exceptional quality. They uncovered a wealth of data that provided real insights into the experience and attitudes of the students who were surveyed. We are grateful also to the students for those insights.

> *"...it's like one of those... you know.... fun park horror halls... ...when you go in its all dark and there are lots of doors but you're not sure where they go... ... and they're all locked, and you need to know the passwords.. ...but they're secret....and nobody will tell us what they are."*
>
> A student interviewee.

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Executive Summary

A MAJOR POLICY SETTING for vocational education and training (VET) in Australia is shaped in terms of the *transition from study to work*. However, the majority of current students, even prior to their enrolment in VET courses, have become accustomed not to a 'transition', but to a *blending or combination of both study and work*. To what extent do VET providers and local employers consider this new reality of simultaneity in their responses to the training needs and experience of young people?

The participants in this research project are enrolled in three different TAFE institutes in three States, two metropolitan and one regional. The local circumstances and courses provided are different, as are the employment opportunities in the three different regions. Despite these contrasting circumstances, the majority of students regard the study and work combination as a 'fact of life', but – apart from those with apprenticeships – see little formal connection between the two. Their courses are one part of their life, their work situations another. This lack of formal connection appears to be promoted as a 'fact of life' by both their training institutions and their employers.

The students in this study are aware that future employment now depends on both qualifications and experience. Many of them report involvement in both paid and unpaid work as a necessary means to establishing a work record for themselves, to complement their eventual training qualifications. In our interview records, there were repeated comments – and some disillusionment – about the competing demands being set up. These demands are seen as a dual commitment – required of them at a personal level if they are to prove to their future employers that they are both qualified and work experienced.

Most of the students surveyed are in some form of either paid or unpaid employment, and are working on average two or more days per week. Only 14 per cent have no intention of working while studying. Such a heavy workplace commitment – even by full-time students – in vocational education and training is:

- not seen as relevant to their training – the supposed 'transition' from study to work
- receives no recognition in course arrangements and credits
- is not explored as an opportunity to further industry partnerships with, or by, local employers

The consultations with local staff and management personnel in the three participating TAFE institutes reveal a level of frustration with the current system, and a willingness to 'rethink' the role which VET might play in the future. However, while students' understandings of the relationship between employment and study have shifted, at each TAFE site an initial response to the issue was to doubt whether student work commitments had any 'vocational' significance. On reflection, staff acknowledged the problem created by structures which assumed that training existed for the 'job' rather than for 'work', with a focus on narrow 'competencies' rather than 'employment skills'. This narrow conception of education and training was seen as a legacy of a previous era, and the greatest barrier to more fully recognising the wide range of employment experiences of the students.

Current training arrangements still treat study and work as sequential rather than complementary elements of the training agenda, and are lagging behind student assessments of market demands. The interface between study and work is a 'fact of life' for them, and integral to their preparation for the 'workforce of the future'. This suggests that, in response to economic change, they are more imaginative about constructing effective pathways into the future than existing training arrangements credit, recognise or allow.

Context

THE COMBINED STUDY and Work Pathways in Vocational Education and Training: Policy Implications and Analysis project investigated the significance of education and employment demands on Vocational Education and Training (VET) students.

Current research, both nationally and internationally (Evans & Heinz 1994; Furlong & Cartmel 1997; du Bois-Reymond 1998; Looker & Dwyer 1998; Rudd & Evans 1998), indicates that in examining various aspects of young people's lives, there is considerable diversity in their priorities and life -goals. Study is but one aspect of their lives. The ways they combine or balance study with their other commitments – including workótake on different meanings in different contexts.

Their own perspectives on their experiences suggest that – even if only at the pragmatic level – the ways in which they are negotiating and constructing central elements of their lives and identity do not always 'sit' easily with the underlying assumptions influencing current policy about young peoples' education and employment.

If there has been a change in students' understandings of the available 'pathways from study to work', it seems likely that both careers advice and training programs would strike a more responsive chord with this generation by building on, and developing, those understandings. A more integrated approach to the relationships between the students' courses and their own work situations would thus recognise and reinforce a balance of commitments at a personal level for them. Are there ways that would effectively make the interface between study and work an explicit component of their training programs? This question was uppermost in our minds as we entered upon this research.

This report documents an investigation of the ways in which VET students in the 1990s are combining study and work in preparation for future long-term career paths. It was conducted throughout 1998 in three Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes in three States, and involved:

- a survey of about 1400 students
- interviews with about 50 students at each of the three institutes
- a follow-up survey with other students
- meetings with staff for feedback on the findings

The report has seven sections.

Background to the study provides the background to the study and outlines its aims, the participating TAFE institutes, and the research timetable.

Initial student questionnaire provides details and analysis of the initial student questionnaire, and pays some attention to some of the regional variations in the results.

Student interviews provides detailed information about the student interviews, details of the make-up of the samples from each institute, the findings from each site on the major research questions, and illustrates those findings by means of a number of case studies.

Findings from student surveys provides an overview of the findings.

Follow-up student questionnaires moves on to what was phase two of the project. It involves a follow-up questionnaire with students – to clarify key issues that emerged in the initial questionnaire and interviews. It also provides an outline of the briefing issues that were to form the basis of follow-up discussions with staff at each of the participating institutions.

Consultations with staff is a record of these consultations with staff, and provides a summary of the implications flowing from this process.

Conclusions presents the overall conclusions of the project. It begins with a discussion of questions of policy that have arisen as a result of undertaking the research, and then examines the outcomes of that research in reference to its initial aims.

Background to the study

The design of the study

The aims of the project were to investigate:

- the type and extent of study and work combinations chosen by the participants, both during their school years and in their post-school settings
- the extent to which such combinations are seen as constraints, matters of expediency, or preferred options in response to changed economic and social conditions
- the relationship between the combinations, and the extent to which other personal commitments are taken into account in determining the combinations and their balance
- the degree of difficulty associated with that balance
- the relationship between current mixed patterns of commitment and expected future outcomes
- the degree of coherence, convergence or disjunction between study areas and job choices
- the implications for VET program design and delivery in the increasing trend for students to undertake their own study and work combinations

It was recognised that to take account of the varied social contexts of young people, both metropolitan and rural students were needed for the purposes of the study. Researchers from three TAFE institutes, encompassing three states in Australia, participated in the project – each campus with its own distinctive attributes.

The participating institutes were:

- Riverina Institute of TAFE New South Wales, which covers a large region in southern New South Wales, with a number of different campuses providing for bigger rural centres as well as outlying areas.
- Box Hill Institute of TAFE, which is located in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, and services the larger metropolitan area – its specialty courses bringing students from all over the city.
- Regency Institute of TAFE, the largest TAFE in South Australia, with multiple campuses across the northern suburbs of Adelaide.

Box Hill and Regency institutes of TAFE, in terms of the research, provided a metropolitan perspective on the study and work situations of TAFE students. Riverina Institute detailed specific issues for students in larger country towns and in more isolated rural areas. Service delivery and policy considerations varied for each of the institutes according to their individual circumstances.

The Project utilised both quantitative and qualitative research procedures. In summary the research involved:

- an initial brief questionnaire for about 1400 entry-level students in the three different VET institutions
- interviews or focus groups of a selected sub-sample of about 50 students in each of the participating institutions
- a later follow-up questionnaire concerning study and work combinations, and key issues emerging from the interviews and focus groups
- follow-up discussions with representatives of each of the participating institutions regarding the implications for programs of the findings

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Participating institutes – general background

Each of the participating institutes had its own distinctive features, both in the range and type of courses offered, and in the characteristics of the student population. In each institute, a local member of staff was appointed to conduct the research. They managed the distribution and return of the two questionnaires, conducted the local interviews and focus groups, and produced an interim report on the findings at the end of the first semester. Details of each of the institutes are given below.

Riverina Institute of TAFE. Researcher – Glenn Costin

The Riverina Institute of TAFE (RIT) covers an area of some 125000 square kilometres. It is a cluster of rural New South Wales TAFE colleges that once operated in semi-independent isolation across the Riverina region of southern New South Wales. Seventeen campuses form the institute, catering for approximately 20000 students. With just under 1500 full and part time staff; RIT is one of the largest employers of the region.

The region is characterised by diversity – in its geography, history, industry and demography. In most cases, each campus must cater to very differing local needs, and as such they have very different course profiles.

RIT has three types of campus.

Level one campuses – the outlying campuses such as Finley, Narrandera, Lake Cargelligo, West Wyalong, Temora and Corowa – with moderately isolated rural town populations of not much more than 8000 persons. Student enrolments vary from 260 at Lake Cargelligo to approximately 730 at Finley. These campuses offer 'logistically uncomplicated' courses such as computing, short business and office administration courses, as well as some basic farming-related courses, such as mechanical, welding or wool subjects. Invariably this clustering of course types also reflects a gender split: females in the computing and office courses, males in the farming and mechanical subjects.

The student populations of such campuses are predominantly female and adult (over 25). The general explanation for this is that the young males, once they have transport, leave for the perceived employment and lifestyle promises of larger cities; or they simply do not return from boarding schools once they have finished schooling. Young females are also more prevalent on the RIT campuses – males are more accepted in general farmwork than females.

Level two campuses – the mid level campuses in larger rural centres such as Deniliquin, Tumut, Young, Leeton, Griffith and Cootamundra, with populations of up to 22000, and student enrolments between 1100 at Young and 2100 at Griffith. These campuses run a large host of courses and occasionally foster 'Centres of Excellence', specific to a local major industry e.g. Tumut – Forestry. While they provide some apprenticeship training and post-trade training, level two campuses cater in the main for small business management, tourism, office administration and computer style courses, as well as engineering and mechanical courses applicable to rural work.

The student body tends to have a greater gender mix, with generally more from the under 25 age group. Some students will have travelled into the campus from outlying centres and be boarding locally, but most are from within the towns' environs, or they travel in for day or block release modules. Students from these campuses may travel up to 400 kilometres for a three-day block of study, should heavy rains prevent travel over a more direct route.

Level three campuses – the large rural city campuses – often with sub or satellite campuses attached – of Wagga Wagga and Albury, with populations of approximately 56000 and 42000 respectively. When Wodonga is added to Albury, the combined local government area has a population of approximately 95000. Student enrolments for Albury in 1997 were 4319, while Wagga Wagga (including North Wagga but not the RAAF base Forest Hill), had 5560 for the same period.

Both Wagga Wagga and Albury/Wodonga campuses incorporate the majority of RIT course offerings, with varying examples of specialisation. At these campuses, youth under 25 predominate, in part due to most of RIT's apprenticeship training being undertaken at these centres, and in part because of the greater resident youth population in these larger cities in comparison to the outlying towns. At these campuses, there are also more students living away from home, having moved to the city to do the specific training they need or desire.

Box Hill Institute of TAFE. Researcher – Mark Landy

The history of the institute dates back to 1924, when the Box Hill Technical School for Girls and Women welcomed its first 65 junior pupils on 31 March 1924. On 2 February 1943, almost 20 years later, the Box Hill Boys' Technical School opened its doors to 470 junior students. In October 1981, Box Hill College was re-named as a college of TAFE, with Whitehorse declared as a TAFE entity in December of 1981. In 1984, these were amalgamated to provide the most diverse range of programs in the TAFE system. In 1994 the Box Hill Institute of TAFE provided education and training programs and services to 26000 students on five main local campuses, as well as home and work-based study programs. Programs and services are offered locally, nationally and internationally.

Now, Box Hill institute is one of Victoria's largest TAFE institutes, with over 150 courses available in a wide range of subject disciplines and delivery methods. All courses provide students with a variety of pathways to employment, promotion and further tertiary study. Courses are available on and off campus, full and part time, in the workplace, and by flexible delivery.

The institute encompasses five main campuses in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, in addition to an offshore campus in Fiji. It also offers industry-based training on-site to large organisations around the world, including countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. The institute today services over 28000 local and international students.

The Electronics Technology Division of the institute offers a diverse range of up-to-date innovative training in information technology, electronic and electrical fields. The new Nelson Campus offers most of these, with state-of-the-art facilities and the very latest in technology. The Building and Engineering Division has available many course topics, ranging from automotive to plumbing and building design.

The institute has a number of courses in business or hospitality that are recognised by their respective industries, and provide graduates with employable skills. Courses cover accounting, marketing, administration, retail, quality-assurance, tourism, hospitality and hairdressing.

The Division of Health, Arts and Sciences provides training in childcare, health and community, disability care and fitness. The division also offers a range of courses in sciences, animal technology and veterinary nursing. The art area offers courses ranging from fine and visual arts to graphic art, furniture design and ceramics, largely at the Doncaster and Whitehorse campuses.

Box Hill's College of Music is also part of the institute. It offers a number of highly recognised courses, including the Advanced Diploma of Music, the Diploma of Music Performance and the Graduate Certificate in Instrumental Music Teaching.

Regency Institute of TAFE. Researcher – Lidia Towsty

Regency Campus is situated about ten kilometres north of Adelaide, with the other campuses – referred to as the Northern Campuses, located a further 10 – 13 kilometres north. Regency Institute of TAFE amalgamated on 1 January 1998, and has subsequently expanded to include four campuses, making it the largest TAFE and VET provider in South Australia. It employs over 600 staff and has over 14518 students enrolled across the four campuses. There are 370 international students, representing 28 countries, studying in courses associated with the hospitality industry, and 20 in the engineering schools. The amalgamation has enabled the institute to provide a variety of training opportunities and career pathways to clients. Of the 14518 students currently enrolled at Regency TAFE, 5518 are female and 9000 are male.

Regency offers full time and part time training for diploma & certificate courses in the following areas:

- Engineering (3620 students enrolled in the school)
- Plumbing & sheetmetal (448)
- Aviation (21)
- Hospitality (752)
- Hotel School & ICHM (International College of Hotel Management)
- Food industry (1650)
- Certificate in water industry (112)
- Vocational preparation (490)
- Children's Services (525)
- Music (126)
- Business studies (879)
- Building & furnishing & manufacturing (70)
- Tourism, travel & recreation (34)
- Information technology (730)
- Textile, clothing & footwear (73)
- Community & health services (626)
- Hairdressing & cosmetology (181)
- Arts (98) (printing & graphic arts, expressive & visual arts)
- Sport & recreation (606)

The three Northern campuses are located in a low socio-economic area, with a high youth unemployment rate. There are ten government secondary schools in the northern area that have had strong links with the Northern campuses institute over many years. The introduction of VISA (VET in SACE Arrangements) in 1996, saw the schools formalising these links, and developing the delivery of VET modules.

The Research timetable

Phase 1: December 1997 – July 1998

- Planning meeting with representatives of participating institutions
- Preparation of initial brief questionnaire and of interview schedule
- Administration of initial questionnaire
- Analysis of initial questionnaire
- Interview program at local sites
- Preparation of interim report

Phase 2: August – October 1998

- Administration of follow-up questionnaire
- Analysis of questionnaire
- Preparation of briefing report for local consultations

Phase 3: November – December 1998

- Local consultations on briefing report
- Analysis of findings from local consultations
- Preparation of final report.

Initial student questionnaire

THE FIRST STEP in the research study involved an introductory questionnaire for students in each institution. Its purpose was to establish the project sample, gather background details, document the prior study and work combinations of the participants, and explore current or likely future combinations during their VET years.

Survey returns

Survey returns from each TAFE were evenly spread in number.

TAFE	Frequency	%
Riverina	404	29
Box Hill	476	35
Regency	495	36

The sample

Gender representation was evenly spread, as shown in the following table, with slightly more males than females. Regency TAFE has a large proportion of males in its courses - possibly as the institute's largest school is engineering

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	744	54
Female	625	46
Age	Frequency	%
Under 19	402	29
Age 19	540	39
Over 19	401	29

It is in the distribution of gender amongst the fields of study that the strongest patterns emerge. It is apparent that particular courses and vocations are still gender-specific.

Main field of study	Frequency	Male	Female
		%	%
Health/community services	116	3	97
Arts/social sciences	78	30	71
Engineering/surveying	286	98	2
Architecture/building	80	100	-
Business/economics	218	27	73
Services/hospitality	165	21	79
Education	35	43	57
Veterinary	17	6	94
Other	339	67	33

Past Work

Respondents were questioned on their past work experience, and asked to reflect on their work status in their final year at secondary school.

Work in final year	Frequency	%
		(of N=1375)
Before or after school	401	45
On weekends	215	24
During school holidays	350	39
At irregular times	522	58
No other work	482	35

It is apparent that most people were already moving between different jobs, hence the multiple responses for the question. Sixty two per cent of the respondents indicated that they were in some form of work, whether it was paid or unpaid. Thus a majority have already had experience in trying to juggle study and work before they have even left school. Of those who had a job of some description, 90 per cent were being paid for it. This could mean that vocational leanings came second to fiscal gain for most people in their work considerations, at this stage in their lives – i.e. it was work for spending money more than a career move. Of the students who were working more than 15 hours a week in their final year at school, (n=198), two thirds were male.

Current work

Of the survey group, 755 (55 per cent) are presently in some form of employment – paid or unpaid. Of those who have full-time employment, 80 per cent are male. Part-time work seems to be the most popular option (although this may be the only option possible) for respondents who work. Only 14 per cent have no intention of working while studying.

Current work	Frequency	%
Intend to get a job	420	32
Have a full time job	131	10
Have a regular part time job	381	29
Have number of other jobs	61	5
Have occasional employment	119	9
Not intending to find a job	188	14

Work and study

Asked whether they had any trouble in leading a lifestyle of work and study, 36 per cent of the working respondents maintained that they preferred to do both. Of those who would prefer to be working without studying, 71 per cent were male. In contrast, of those who preferred to be studying without working, 60 per cent were female

.

Combining Work and study	Frequency	%
Work takes priority	125	14
Need work, but prefer not to	157	18
Need work, but find it difficult	162	18
Prefer to do both	318	36
Prefer work without study	246	28
Prefer study without work	179	20

The optimism of the survey group is shown in the fact that 38 per cent of them believed they would have no problem in combining work and study further into the course, compared to 12 per cent who thought they would.

The nature of the respondents' work can be observed in the final question of the survey. Nearly half of them do not see their current work as related to the course they have undertaken at TAFE. This would seem to indicate that work is usually taken up as a monetary measure, rather than as a career move, for respondents.

Work and study compatibility	Frequency	%
Directly related	205	24
No real relationship	409	48
Somewhat related	122	14
Study useful for job	54	6
Work useful for study	64	7

Regional factors

Each institute of TAFE – Box Hill, Riverina and Regency – retains its own particular characteristics. This, in turn, shows in some of the data. The gender breakdown, for example, shows a disproportionately large male respondent representation at Regency TAFE, while at Riverina TAFE there are almost twice as many females as males.

Gender by TAFE	Male	Female
	%	%
Riverina	35	65
Box Hill	45	55
Regency	78	22

For those males at Regency, nearly two thirds are in engineering courses. Of the females at Riverina, more than one third are in business and economics courses.

Business and economics appears to be the largest stream of study for respondents at Riverina – 27.5 per cent of the respondents in this field of study. Box Hill has an even spread across courses. Regency has a large number of engineering students – 52 per cent of the Regency respondents. All three Institutes have a large number of respondents from the 'other' category of study – made up of apprentice students.

In terms of employment, Box Hill respondents had a higher success rate of finding paid or unpaid work than either Riverina or Regency in their final year of secondary school.

Secondary school work (paid or unpaid) by TAFE	Working paid/unpaid (% of TAFE popn)
Riverina	61
Box Hill	74
Regency	53

This pattern of Box Hill respondents' greater success in finding work continues into the first year of study at TAFE. This would seem to show that the higher unemployment rates in the regions for Regency and Riverina affect the work patterns of their respondents.

First year work (paid or unpaid) by TAFE	**Working paid/unpaid (% of TAFE popn)**	
Riverina	53	
Box Hill	68	
Regency	43	
Need work but prefer not to by TAFE	Frequency	% (of TAFE popn)
Riverina	30	7
Box Hill	73	15
Regency	54	11

In contrast, 23 per cent of the Regency sample retains a vocational preference in its perspectives on work and study.

Prefer work without study by TAFE	**Frequency**	**% (of TAFE popn)**
Riverina	62	15
Box Hill	69	14
Regency	115	23

Summary

From the introductory survey, there are some general background patterns discernible. Males are focused in particular courses like engineering and apprenticeships. Females take up courses in an array of topics – arts, health and business. Males tend to be more vocationally focused – a greater number taking up study in relation to their work and preferring their work to study. The nature of the work shows that in both high school and TAFE it is not usually related to long-term career plans – it is work to earn a living, rather than a life-long commitment. Of the three regions, employment rates are highest in Box Hill, and it is there that respondents have a higher rate of non-interest in their jobs. The work situations for the three regions, and their relation to study remain to be investigated in greater depth.

Student interviews

THE PURPOSE OF the interview and focus group stage was to explore in greater depth with some of the participants their preferences:

- either for or against mixing study and work
- the kinds of study and work combinations they are developing
- their reasons for the choices they have made.

Researchers also identified particular regional issues that could apply.

The three regional samples

The Riverina sample

'Farmers', 'townies' and 'big town folk': rationale and definitions

In reviewing the responses to 50 student interviews, it became apparent that to generalise them with respect to the major research questions would effectively minimise the diversity of the sample. It is this diversity which strongly characterises the life experiences of students of an inland region serviced by RIT. For this reason, the report on the Riverina sample will work under the following three student types: 'Farmers', 'Townies' and 'Big Town Folk'. These groups are representative of life experiences which are mutually relevant as perceived by the researcher and the general location of the respondents in question. They are also a reflection of how those students perceive themselves and others: i.e. how they themselves tend to describe the social circumstances in which they find themselves.

Definitions:

'Farmers' – students whose homes are outside towns or large rural centres, and are separated from such locations not so much by time as by 'unserviced' distance. 'Unserviced' in this context means that public transportation is not present, so students must provide for themselves or seek the help of parents, relatives or friends.

'Townies' – these students live in small rural towns or centres such as Narrandera, West Wyalong, or Deniliquin (a non-exclusive listing). Usually this means that there are more, but still limited, local employment options readily available, particularly in part time work. Greater access to entertainment and transport is less of an issue when employment or study options are local – a highly relevant issue when they are not.

'Big Town Folk' – living in large rural centres such as Albury/Wodonga and Wagga Wagga, students of this category have generally more options both in employment and study close to hand. Distances, or times taken to travel those distances, may equal or even surpass those of the first category (farmers), however such distances are generally 'serviced' by public transport.

Aboriginal representation

It was proposed that aboriginal students on the RIT campuses be incorporated with the interview sample to provide an outlook on their particular circumstances. This proved to be difficult, as both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in general tend to see each other as separate and conduct themselves so. This means that courses tend to be segregated, as well as employment and lifestyles. In addition, aboriginal communities and individuals are very suspicious of researchers, interviewers and surveys, and desire some control over the information that they provide – or at least knowledge of its future use by, or value to, others.

It became obvious that there were several distinct student 'types' – whose lives could not be generalised and that 'Farmers', 'Townies' and 'Big Town Folk' failed to describe adequately the radically different experiences of a fourth group – 'Aboriginals'. To provide a description of this group, and for that description to have any value, it would be necessary to divide further their experiences into those who are based in around towns, and those from outlying communities. Such a project was beyond the scope of this research, and so the fourth group 'Aboriginals' has not been isolated. It should be regarded as unaccounted for – despite the inclusion of some aboriginal interviewee material. (It should also be noted that the word 'Aboriginal' is used in preference to 'Koori', as it is generally applicable and accepted across communities, rather than Koori – which has regional connotations not always relevant in the large area covered by RIT).

The Box Hill sample

The 44 interview respondents were to an extent self-selecting in that they volunteered to be involved. Participants were approached by the research officer either directly in class, or via a request and information flyer that was attached to the survey instrument. The second option yielded better responses – perhaps students were a little apprehensive about volunteering in public. Initially 55 students agreed to be involved in the interviews. The final number of interviews was 44 and two informal focus groups were conducted.

The interview sample consisted of 11 males and 33 females. Areas of study included:

- Theatre studies
- Business
- Cosmetics
- Child care
- Hospitality
- Applied science
- Electrical
- Information technology, library studies
- Dance
- Fabrication

Getting to the specified sample group

To some extent this proved more challenging than first anticipated. First year TAFE classes had a broad range of students including: part time students, mature age married students returning to study, those who had taken a year or two off to work and save; overseas students; workers who had returned to TAFE to acquire employment related qualifications; and so on. This point was raised with the management team and it was agreed that the researcher could use discretion in the selection of the respondents. To capture this diversity and to complete the interviews within project timelines, all the students who were interviewed were first year, full time students, but not all had come straight from school.

About the sample group

What were their motivations for volunteering? Each of the volunteers was questioned on their reasons for participating. The majority said that the study sounded interesting and they felt that in some way they fitted the pattern of the working and studying student. Some said that it was an opportunity to tell someone what they are doing, while others said it simply sounded interesting.

Several students came with their friends and this proved to be a real bonus as the interviews became dialogues and mini focus groups. A couple of students 'opened up' and spoke frankly about the difficult positions they are in and the demands put on them from parents, employers or issues at home.

It was noticed that many of the females treated the interviews as a real social occasion bringing friends with them. In contrast this kind of informal gathering of students happened only a couple of times with the male volunteers. The conversations with a number of the female students tended to be more open and fluid, while the male student interviews tended to be more 'one on one.'

The Regency sample

The Regency sample consisted of 50 participants – 33 males and 17 females. They were selected using the following criteria:

- first year TAFE entrants
- had left school anytime in the last 4 years
- currently employed on a part time, casual basis
- were employed on a part time basis while at school, and are either still employed on a part time basis, or are no longer employed
- left school, had part time or full time employment, then returned to study, and are either working now or ceased working

Major research questions

Study and work combinations – type and extent

Riverina

Farmers

Gender appears to have a big impact upon the type of work and study combinations chosen by members of this group despite certain trends being similar. Males tend to choose 'masculine' jobs, females 'feminine' jobs; i.e. males tend to work at other farms or at the local silo; females tend to work more flexibly, taking whatever they can get – be it McDonald's, the local pub, part time secretarial work, babysitting, grocery stores, newsagents, petrol stations, etc.

In relation to unpaid work however, there is a big difference between males and females. Males tend to work unpaid only when it relates to their current career aims, while females often work unrelated and unpaid hours – in some cases up to 20 hours per week. Overall, males in this group tend to do more unpaid work than females.

In each case where students – males or females – lived on or came from a farm, without exception they returned to work there at some time during the week. Prior to leaving school and taking up study, the male and female division is again clear: males tended to work on the farm or neighbouring farms, while females had more diverse activities.

From the interviews of this group, there is an important point that is not reflected in mere figures. Females, almost without exception, acknowledge some relationship with their current work activities and a future employment aim, and are more open to seeing the possibilities of skill transfer. Males in this group on the other hand, seldom mentioned such transferability of skill.

Townies

As with the 'Farmers', paid work seldom relates to study being undertaken. However unlike the first group, all interviewees acknowledged the transferability of skills from their current employ to their future ambitions.

Within this group, job types remained for females similar to those of group one, lots of nannying and babysitting while at school; progressing to supermarket, shop assistant work upon 'graduating'. For males, it would appear that again it was family based work that was undertaken – generally unpaid or with a nominal return (pocket money). The family business of this group was not land, but rather industry or commerce based.

There is an important difference between this group and the 'Farmers' group – there were very few males in this group. This was because not many worked at all – many 'Townie' males simply have no employment, and so did not desire to be interviewed.

Big Town Folk

Firstly, what is noticeable with 'Big Town Folk' is that males and females are similar in their approach to work and study – as distinct from the disparity demonstrated by 'Townies' and 'Farmers'. Males in this group more readily appreciate the validity and transferability of their work experiences to future career aims than in the previous groups. Likewise, there is a greater prevalence for males in this group to work away from home while at school – as females have tended to do in all groups.

A second issue of note with this group is that 'Big Town Folk' tend to be much more independent than their rural counterparts – or perhaps it could be said that they are much more on their own. Unlike the 'Townies' or the 'Farmers', these youth must find their own jobs through their own resources, be that friends or newspapers. Work for both genders in this group tend to be fast food, pubs, restaurants, cleaning agencies, etc.

Unpaid work for both males and females (excepting the specific circumstances of single mothers,) tends to be solely career related – if it might get them a job they do it, if not then they don't. Teachers of male pre-apprenticeship trade classes at Albury, Griffith and Wagga Wagga have also noted this trend. Male students are reluctant to have their class involved in community development projects, should such projects in anyway deflect the course from its core module outcomes. If it is not necessary to the passing of an assessment, then it is not of interest or value. Interestingly, this is contrary to the other trend in 'Big Town Folk' males, which demonstrates a growing awareness of the transferability of skills and work experience.

The amount of unpaid work being done is much higher also than in previous groups, particularly in males doing work away from parents' home or family business. It should be noted, however, that most students interviewed in this group were involved in pre-trade training, certificate or diploma courses. All of these courses – besides the office administration courses – either included a work experience element, or encouraged work experience to be sought. Most students took up this option, but would often extend the hours far beyond that proposed by the curriculum; e.g. one student was doing 35 hours per week of unpaid plumbing work in his endeavours to 'prove himself' to potential employers.

Box Hill

The experience for the overwhelming majority of students has been and continues to be one of combining study and work. Of the 44 respondents, all but 8 are currently working in paid employment.

Working students' paid work

Excluding the apprentices and mature age students, the majority of students are working in jobs that are in the retail or hospitality or service sectors. They are employed on a casual or part time basis, while some are working in the family business.

The range of employment is:

Sector	Number of students
Retail – shop assistants, supermarket checkout	10
Hospitality – bar work, waitressing, kitchen hands	8
Teaching – dance	4
Odd jobs, self employed (baby sitting, gardening, football umpiring)	3

Hours worked

The hours of casual and part time work ranged from five to six hours per week, to a couple of cases where respondents, in addition to their full time study, are working 25 – 30 hours per week.

- 10 respondents work between 5 – 10 hours per week
- 9 respondents work between 10 and 20 hours per week. About half of these respondents said their average week is usually around 12 – 15 hours
- weekend work with a Thursday or Friday night shift, sometimes both, was the most common configuration
- 4 respondents were working two jobs

Of the non-working students, two are overseas students newly arrived, so they are facing considerable cultural hurdles coping with the demands of their course and in simply adjusting to their new way of life. One of these students does intend however to begin looking for work next semester. The other student expects that she will not work until she has completed her course at the end of next year.

The remaining 6 students said that they were either too busy to study and work, or they wanted to focus exclusively on their studies. These students did not believe that this approach would disadvantage them when they began to look for work. Some of the students had made the decision not to work so they could give maximum time to their studies. It also appears to be the case that an arrangement or agreement has been made with the parents to support their son or daughter while they are studying.

The mature age first year students were all female and married with families. Studying and looking after their families was considered to be 'enough for the moment'.

Unpaid work

A number of respondents approached this question rather cautiously, even a little self-consciously – it is not entirely clear why. The married women clearly felt that they were doing hours of unpaid work, while a small number of the living at home students said that they helped around the house with the washing up and other household chores. Three respondents were actively working for volunteer organisations, e.g. World Vision.

Overall, the issue of unpaid work did not figure all that prominently in the interviews.

Regency

Nine of the fifty participants did not work during their school years.

The following table is a gender breakdown of those participants who did work in their school years, and their respective year levels and ages.

School Year	Number of Participants		Average age (years)
	Female	Male	
During year 10	5	10	15 – 16
End of year 10	4	5	
During year 11	3	9	16 – 17
End of year 11	-	2	
During year 12	1	2	17 – 18

It is clear that a majority of the participants gained work at a younger age.

During the school term, hours of employment ranged from eight to twenty hours a week. Most of this work was done on Thursday evening shopping hours and weekends – either full day Saturdays or Sundays, or sometimes both. Hours of employment increased to nearly full-time during school or public holidays.

Type of work

Most of the casual work was in supermarkets, fast food outlets, and department stores. The supermarkets and department stores employed casual labour as night-fill (stocking shelves) mid-week, or as checkout operators and sales assistants, or on Friday nights and weekends. In fast food outlets, they were generally employed as kitchen hands, or in serving customers or making deliveries.

Other types of casual work included combinations of odd jobs, which either remained static during the school years, or changed as the students moved through their school years. There were many types of this work, including: lawn mowing, delivering the local paper, babysitting, office cleaning, cafe and restaurant bar work and waiting, and work as attendants at either car-parks or a sports arena.

Post school setting

All fifty participants were at the time of interview (March – June) continuing their casual employment from either their school days, or from the previous year when they had been employed on a full time basis having left school two or three years ago.

Two participants were in fact working full time and studying at TAFE as trainees, yet retained the part time work they had obtained in their school years. One was working as a volunteer in a community radio station during the week, as well as doing weekend work - cleaning and ironing – for some cash.

Hours of part time work generally increased for those who went to TAFE from school, ranging from eight to twenty four hours a week. The reason given was that TAFE courses are not as intense as school was, and homework demands are not as pressured. Students concurred that they had 'more spare time' now that they were at TAFE, and therefore preferred to increase their working hours where possible, in order to earn more.

As in the past when at school, students increased their hours of work to full time during holiday periods. Eleven students – 4 females, 7 males – were working part time in course related employment. Again, the majority of participants continued with the same part time employment that they had gained while at school.

Eight students chose not to pursue any further study or training straight after school. Most considered school 'a waste of time', and saw no value of continuing with it or any other further studies. It was during their years in the workforce that their experiences had caused a change in attitude and they researched avenues for new work. Training at TAFE became their option.

Constraints, expediency or preference

Riverina

Farmers

The statements from both females and males in this group are quite simple – '... what else can you do?'. Work consists of that which can be found – preference has little to do with it. Both genders will work for money, and take whatever work is available. Rarely does that work relate to the study being undertaken.

Townies

Their situation is much the same as the 'Farmers' – only with a slightly better spread of options. Country towns reflect the rural and tourist economic base around them, providing services to their regions, and these same service industries provide a few more choices for the youth of the area. Work is still hard to find. Both males and females are directed by expediency rather than preference in finding work. Males appear to have fewer options.

Big Town Folk

Expediency is still a major factor for this group, however there are far more options – even if those options tend to run more into fast food outlets and supermarkets, rather than career-opening opportunities.

Box Hill

Preferred option – to study and work

The majority of respondents prefer to work and study. These respondents spoke of the obvious need to work so they can support themselves as best they can. The respondents who were working and studying tended to look at their situations with a certain matter of factness – that working and studying was an established fact of life. However, there is another dimension to this point – vividly captured by one respondent, 'I don't like scumming off my parents, and I feel proud that I can buy my own mobile phone'.

In spite of heavy study schedules, only four of the working students said that they would give up their work if they had the choice. It was generally agreed that being in the workforce did – of itself – enhance the chances of finding work in the chosen field. As one respondent said, 'It all looks good on your resume!'

Combining study and work is viewed as essential for respondents who are looking to 'upskill' or move into new career paths. None of the students regretted working during school, and all thought it was beneficial for them, particularly on their resumes. They feel employers want to see students demonstrating initiative and responsibility, and that these factors could only be reflected by actively participating in the workforce.

At TAFE, most participants find they do not have the same pressured academic demands that they had at school, and expressed desire to increase their work hours if they had not already done so. Four participants suggested that their work was at times a mild constraint on their course responsibilities, but nowhere near what it was like while they were at school. Not working at all was not an option. All enjoyed their income – which was spent indulging their wants. Except for the few who were living away from home, income was a necessity covering living costs.

Relationship between combinations – a question of balance

Riverina

In this and the following Section, the 'Farmers' are not differentiated from the 'Townies' and the 'Big Town Folk'. The question of balance seems to be an individual affair, dependent more upon individual perspective and personal circumstances, rather than collective social, physical or economic surroundings.

The main point with the relationship between paid work and study is similar to all groups, and that is that, generally, there is none. The majority find the paid work 'a bit of a drag', but otherwise it is not a major interference. Surprisingly, most state that work held the main priority – even if it was unrelated to the course. This was particularly so when it came to unpaid work experience, which they feel may get them a job later on. It was frequently stated by all groups – male and female – who were involved in combinations of unpaid and paid work, that it was this juggle, not the study and work balance, that gave the most stress.

There were two factors in the 'Farmers' group that stood out:

- The distance needed to be travelled to study – often on dark, early morning or late evening country roads.
- Most of the females were studying something that did not necessarily interest them as a career. They just felt that they had to do something, and this was the only full time course available to them in the area.

A Case Study:'Farmers' (Male)

Gordon, 18 years of age, lives on his parents' farm about 30 km out of Albury. He is studying plumbing.

Gordon plays a lot of football, for which he is paid a small income. The football takes up about 6 – 7 hours per week. Gordon made the comment that it perhaps helped with his attitude to team work, and also gave him many contacts in the various trades for possible future employment. On his parents' farm, he is heavily involved in general farm duties, amounting to some 20 hours per week or more. The work is mainly with sheep, but also fencing and farm maintenance, and is done because of family need. He enjoys this work, but prefers his other unpaid job with a local plumber, where he gains valuable experience – which he hopes in the future to turn into an apprenticeship. He states that it also helps to make sense of the plumbing course he is doing at TAFE.

Previously Gordon has had only farming work or his football for income, concluding that this is mostly due to his locality and family life style, rather than particular choices he faced. Choosing to take up plumbing was in response to suggestions from the school careers adviser, who noted his handy work while in years 11 & 12.

Gordon feels '...pretty good, 'I know what I'm doing now'. He has decided to put more of his effort into the plumbing course, being convinced that this is to be his future direction. TAFE and plumbing take priority for now and 'footy has backed off a bit'.

Between the work and study, work is the main priority, as he hopes to gain an apprenticeship out of it, but TAFE is still very important. He finds that it all '...mingles in pretty good...always got time for footy', and that work aids his study and vice-versa. In five years' time, Gordon hopes to see himself as a qualified plumber, still living at home but doing less farm work and still playing football. Main priority however is to '...get that apprenticeship'.

Box Hill

As stated in the previous section, combining study and work is for most of the respondents an established fact of life. Largely, the relationship between study and work is pre-determined by the hours and demands of the course. Working hours fit around the course hours – for most of the respondents this means working after 5 pm. on weekdays or working on weekends. In this group, some respondents were restricted to working whenever they could, while others worked to set shifts and routines.

In general, the interviews revealed two distinct patterns.

- The cohort of married respondents with children, all female, spoke of their commitment to their families. While these women spoke with genuine excitement about the courses they were studying, they were also keenly aware of the impact this was having on their relationships with partners and children.
- The extent to which other personal commitments influenced the balance of study and work was not as clear. Some students spoke of sporting demands but these kinds of considerations tended to take second place to study and work.

A Case Study: Box Hill

Jenny is a 20 year old hospitality student. Her course is between 35 – 40 hours per week. On top of this she works every night, except Thursday, from 5.30 – 9.30 at a local Returned Servicemen's League doing bar work. On Saturdays she works all day, often finishing at 1.30 a.m. Her determination to succeed and her punishing schedule really made an impression.

Jenny has been working since she was 13 years old. Her parents have obviously been a significant influence in her life and after she had completed Year 12 and she 'didn't know what to do', her father bought her an airfare for London. This was also a gift for her 18th birthday. As she said, he wanted her to 'see the world and be independent'.

She was away for two years and for much of that time she managed a hotel in England. This experience was the spark for her desire to work in hospitality. She returned home and heard about the Box Hill course by word of mouth. After being initially rejected she was accepted in a mid year intake. Her views on the purpose of being at TAFE are unequivocal. The point for her is to "get the experience and skills and not to muck around and make friends. I couldn't care less about the social aspects of the course. Any way I am too busy to worry about it".

Jenny also wants to do as well as she can, "I want distinctions". At her work she watches her managers closely and she assesses herself against them. She wants to be not just a manager, but "a good one- which is hard". She described her current situation as "tiring but rewarding". She said she loved being at home and "my family are my best friends. I would rather spend time with them than my friends". Her goal is to be a good manager and the "best at what I do".

Regency

Because most of the participants have been working for at least 18 months, while still at school, they have organised their social patterns and personal commitments around their work and study. At this stage many had made new friends in their part time work and, as most peers have some part time employment, work does not seem to impinge on spare time nor be a cause for a lack of a social life.

Combining part time work and study was not seen as a burden. Only one participant mentioned he would not be increasing his hours at work as he was thinking of joining the local football club, which would mean hours of training.

Those not working in course-related jobs expressed their desire to be doing so, particularly wishing to gain apprenticeships and traineeships.

A Case Study: Regency

Ben is an 18 year old, first year full time TAFE student studying in the Associate Diploma in Electronic Engineering. He does not live at home, as he is from the country and lives on his own in a rented flat. Living with relatives in the city did not work out.

With the help and recommendation of a friend, Ben is currently employed by a car park company on a fortnightly weekend roster system – at three different locations. On the night shift he works eight hour shifts and on the day shift he works a total of 21 hours. Ben had been at this location for eight months at the time of his interview. Prior to the current job he worked 15 hours a week in a supermarket for almost three years.

He does not enjoy his job but it suits Ben for the time being. It is not physically demanding, it pays well, and because he mostly sits out his shift in a booth, he has plenty of time not only to complete assignments but also maintain his avid reading interests.

It has always been Ben's ambition to study at university in the information technology course and this determined his subject choices at senior school. He was unsuccessful in gaining university entrance and returned to school to repeat subjects (Year 13) in the hope that second time round he would be successful. He wasn't and so he settled to enrol at TAFE. He still intends to enrol into university after he completes his current course. Ben is different from those of his peers interviewed. Most indicated they would rather find full time employment and only study further at the expense of an employer who would deem it necessary. Ben, on the other hand, quite enjoys the rigourss of study. He could not explain his deep desire to go to university, but he suspects it is because of the intellectual environment that he believes it offers.

Ben describes his school years as "basically boring" and he feels he would have fared better if had known that the current course he is studying was available as an option two years ago. Spending three years attempting to enter university he feels was a waste of time. Because Ben was certain he would go to university, he was devastated, and he said he changed in attitude as a result – "don't take things for granted any more".

Ben is generally cynical about life but cannot help being optimistic about his future. Because he expended an enormous amount of effort at school and did not attain his goal, he is a lot more "realistic" about life and work. He is not applying the same efforts this year and is content to cruise along. He finds the course interesting but not demanding.

Difficulties in the balancing act

Riverina

Paid work was a stated need by all concerned. Unpaid work was a chosen strategy: aimed at gaining a foothold in a desired career, a chance to gain experience and to 'prove oneself'. The problems come when the perceived sole gateway into that desired career is unpaid work, and that to do this they must forego needed paid part time or casual employment.

This issue was raised in the focus group, and the consensus of opinion was that there needs to be some form of governmental assistance, either to employers or to the students, to:

- make these gateway strategies a little less constricted
- provide financial incentives to employers so that they may be able to pay for this semi skilled labour force, or
- give funding to the students involved on a system not dissimilar to the Aboriginal Community Development and Education Program (CDEP)

A Case Study: 'Townies' (Female)

Amanda, 17 years of age, is doing a course in hospitality operations. She share rents a house in Cootamundra but returns to her parents home in Temora on weekends.

Amanda works a number of jobs in her efforts to self-finance her education and gain experience in her chosen field. On weekends, Amanda puts in 8 – 15 hours at a supermarket in her home town, and when not there she works at her parents' café doing another six hours. This pays for her week day accommodation in Cootamundra where the TAFE is located, some three-quarters of an hour away. In addition Amanda works casually through the week at a caterers in Cootamundra, averaging another 3 – 4 hours. Amanda doesn't mind the supermarket work as she feels the experience is still relevant to her career aim of being a chef (she works in the deli). The catering work she loves and would do more. The café work Amanda also likes and would do it to help out her parents, paid or unpaid. In addition, she sees it as relevant experience.

Whenever she can, Amanda likes to work at the local childcare centre in her parents' town for anything up to six hours. She does this to keep in touch with her fall back career aim of childcare – this was her primary aim before working part time at a catering business.

Amanda finds that 'sometimes' studying at Cootamundra and having to be at work one hour later at Temoraî. In addition, she must sometimes make a decision between working at the caterers in Cootamundra, which she enjoys the most, and working at Temora in the supermarket, her main source of income. She cannot afford to lose her job at the supermarket nor refuse catering too often. She finds the caterers work particularly valuable to her studies, and the supermarket will one day be her main work reference in gaining an apprenticeship. It is this juggling between several jobs and the travel which makes life most difficult at present.

Amanda is very much the 'Townie' female representative – though perhaps slightly larger than life in that representation. Not all 'Townie' females do quite as much as she does, but many do similar, if less. Amanda has, like many 'Townie' youth, given everything a go, yet still is not in full time employment, and it grates. Like her peers, she has studied, worked hard at casual jobs, worked unpaid for experience, changed direction and tried again, still to no avail. Despite this, also like many of her peers, Amanda is still optimistic and planning – unlike the males of her group who are much less positive. The driving that Amanda must do is also reasonably typical of both this and the 'Farmer' groups, in that the course she desires to study is in one town and she lives in another.

Box Hill

This question elicited a varied and rich amount of information from the respondents. Of those who are working, 18 said that they are managing to combine both work and study. When pressed on how successfully they felt they were managing, comments ranged as follows:

- 'it's okay'
- 'it's no big deal'
- 'it's nowhere near as bad as last year (year 12)'
- study and work as a 'complimentary relationship'
- 'no major problems, not stressing at all'
- 'easier than I expected'
- 'I want to keep working'
- 'not a bother'
- 'pretty happy except when you get lots of work'
- 'no real dramas'
- 'if you stay on track you are okay'

A Case Study: Box Hill

John is 16 years old. He is in a pre-apprenticeship program. Getting him to volunteer was a story in itself. When the interviewer arrived in his class it became evident early on that he was bored out of his mind. As the interviewer was talking to the group and then their teacher, he could be seen to be listening and it appeared that he might volunteer, even though his body language and wise cracking remarks indicated something else. The interviewer started talking to him, and found out that he played football and he worked at the footy club. It seemed that he wanted to talk, that he had things to say, but he wasn't going to openly volunteer in front of the group. After a few more urgings, he agreed to be involved.

John is a student who desperately wants to work. While his story had particular resonance in its own right, it also reminded me of the feelings and frustrations the interviewer had heard expressed by other young males when working in secondary schools as a Vocational Education Project Officer. He completed Year 10 last year. It was clear from his comments that his secondary school experience has not been rewarding and this pattern is continuing in TAFE.

When asked to explain what he meant about school being a "waste of time" he mentioned that the only part of school he enjoyed was the work experience program at Year 10. The work program was significant, as this was how he got his first experience of electrical work. When asked why he chose to be an electrician he said, "I don't want a dirty job. I'd hate climbing around under houses and through cobwebs and you never run out of business."

As the interview progressed he became quite candid about his own performance at TAFE and the effect it was having on him and his mother. He said, "I know I should be doing better. Last year I wanted to quit school but Mum urged me to try and find a course. I know I should be trying harder but I get so bored. I want to work – get an apprenticeship. I've had a few run ins with the teachers. Mum has had to come up a couple of times."

Concerns

A small number of respondents spoke of real hardship and about how they were not managing or coping with the course, with work, or both.

Time spent travelling to campus was also identified as a contributing factor to problems in study and work. For students without private transport, it can take up to 90 minutes to get to school by public transport. These students are spending a total of three hours a day catching and riding on public transport. For these students this was the 'worst aspect' of their current situation.

Students also talked about the demanding nature of the course. It appears that the long hours and intensive requirements of various TAFE courses took a number of respondents by surprise, but apart from the odd student who had decided that working was out of the question, the majority had made the necessary adjustments.

The significance of the practical placement component in several courses was noted by many of the respondents. This is an integral part of theatre studies, dance, child care and information technology (library). In these courses some 150 hours are devoted to students working in an industry or enterprise relating to their field of study. Often the placement will take place after-hours, so some students were quite worried about how this is going to impact on their current employment. For several students across various fields of study, the implications of the practical placement are yet to be tested, but there is some obvious concern about it.

Apprentices

In the course of the interviews five apprentices were spoken with. Three were apprentice electricians and the other two were doing fabrication and boilermaking.

Two of the electricians felt that it was hard combining the study and work – particularly when the pressure was on at work. These two apprentices were older, 25 and 23 respectively. As one of them said 'The last thing I feel like doing at the end of a long day is getting my head into a book'.

One of the apprentice boilermakers made some fascinating observations about his work place. His workmates consider the time he spends at college as a 'day off. They all whinge about me having the day off'. His employer also makes it difficult for the respondent, as he only pays for half of his schooling costs and the respondent has to 'work unpaid overtime to make up the difference.'

Regency

At Regency at this stage – first semester – performance in the course is the priority. Each participant has set their career path into motion, and success in this is a definite priority. They would decrease hours within their job if course demands became greater. Students are constantly monitoring their progress and are ready to reduce hours of work if necessary. Once again, except for those working in course related fields, none wish to pursue careers in their current place of employment.

A Case Study: Regency

Joseph lives at home and is studying in his first year as a full time student in the Associate Diploma in Electronic Engineering (Stage 1). He currently works at Target and has been there for four years. He works approximately 15 – 20 hours a week. He enjoys the friendly atmosphere and staff. Also, working in a huge shopping complex has its social and monetary rewards – gets discounts and free meals and drinks from other retail outlets. Joe echoed his peers when he said "it'll do for now, at least until I get a proper job".

Joe continued with his senior years with the aim to go to university and study engineering or gain an apprenticeship in electronics. He enjoyed school in general at the time, but harbours deep resentment now because he reluctantly entered TAFE. It was apparent that status is very important to Joe. To him TAFE is a soft option and simple. Not attaining a high enough score for entry into university and no luck in gaining an apprenticeship "took the wind out of Joe's sails" and humbled him.

He does not resent being at TAFE, as such, but resents being 'let down' and having no choice but to go to TAFE. What made matters worse for him, was that his friends gained entry into university and ''they are 'uni students', while I'm just a 'TAFE student'".

Joe moved out of home during year 11 but is now living back at home. The added bonus is no living costs such as rent, bills, and shopping which gives him more cash to spend. There are a few classmates (current) who are working in part time jobs associated with electronics and Joe envies them. He would much rather have that than work at Target, but "I don't want to hear another, 'not at the moment mate come back in six months time' line for the rest of my life, well, not now anyway." Target, it seems, has become his 'security blanket'. Joe has a very determined attitude toward being successful and excelling in his current course, as he does not want to go through the same disappointments again.

Joe is a quietly spoken young man who dresses trendily and "business – like", carrying a mobile phone with him. He drives a car and regards himself as being independent. He carefully chose his words when responding to issues raised and tried hard (albeit unsuccessfully) not to show too many emotions when he talked about school or his disappointments at the end of year 12.

Relation between current activities and perceived outcomes

Riverina

One could be forgiven for wondering at this point how much of the students' VET related activities are planned strategies, rather than a refection of positive reinforcement and encouragement by peers and family. From the interviews, it would appear that – for both males and females – there is a plan in at least half of the cases, and a dangerous amount of despair and disillusionment in the rest. As stated earlier, how an individual chooses to view a given situation is just that, individually, and thus quite different despite similar circumstances. Having said that, it is still relevant to isolate the groups once more.

Farmers

Males in this group tended on the whole to be reasonably positive about their futures. What they were doing, both in study and paid and unpaid work, was all to their benefit in the long run. In part this was due to having a perceived secure future in the solidity of a farm, even if only as a fall back.

Females interviewed, on the other hand, rarely had ambitions to return or remain on the farms. The last line to many of these interviews was 'anywhere but here' when it came to future residency or employment.

Townies

The two male local 'Townies' interviewed were even less enthusiastic than the 'Farmer' females. Those that travelled in to the major centres of Albury and Wagga Wagga to complete courses held more positive images of their futures; although this could be explained by them having family businesses to fall back on as a tangible support.

The females on the other hand tended to be very connected to what they were doing and had quite definite ideas about how they might get there. Even when the current activity was a stated temporary expediency, more permanent future aims were not seen to be out of reach. 'Townie' females seemed to be very good at seeing possibilities and options, and did not suffer from the negativity of their male counterparts, or the females in more outlying areas. Often working more than one job, females in this group were generally quick to point out the value of their experiences to future employers. However, like the 'Farmer' females, they were equally quick to state that they would rather have future employment in a centre other than where they were.

Big Town Folk

Both males and females tended to operate similarly in this group with respect to work choices and attitude. Despite this, course choices are still very segregated in that males do the trades, females the business, clerical, childcare courses etc. Also, there is a marked difference in attitude to study between genders, despite the approach to work and study combinations being surprisingly similar.

Collectively this group tends to be fairly goal oriented with a planned approach in what they set out to achieve. The major difference is that females invariably stated that the study was the main priority, and the underlying belief would appear to be that it was the study which would get them the position they sought.

Males, however, expressed a belief in the work experience's capacity to gain them their goals, and few gave much credit or real value to the course credentials. Aside from the above disparity, both genders tended to work and study with a fairly flexible approach to gaining employment. They approached work and study with differing emphases, but in the end were actively, and reasonably positively, exploring vocational entry options.

A Case Study: 'Big Town Folk' (Male)

Tim, 16 years of age, is still living at home in Wagga Wagga. He is doing a pre-apprenticeship program in carpentry and joinery. Tim works 15 hours a week at McDonald's, a job he is sick of but does for the money. During the holidays he also does work for a builder, primarily for experience, but he doesn't knock back the pay check. He believes the McDonald's experience has been good for him in that it has helped with time management and it demonstrates a willingness to work that potential employers will see. On Fridays he works unpaid for a local builder, from which he claims to gain invaluable experience and skills. It also helps to put his TAFE study into context and vice-versa. Tim also feels that while this particular builder may not have work enough to 'put me on', other builders (potential employers) get to see him working.

He is very happy with the way things are going and that it is a practical step on his career path, "very much the right choice".

These days building work for Tim comes first before his study, and he states that in fact his study gets in the way of work – he still does not like to study after class hours. His McDonald's hours however can get in the way of the practical side of his TAFE study, as on Monday nights he must 'close' McDonald's, and that means a 1.00 am finish after which he must be at the TAFE building site at 8.00 am. He finds himself a bit 'out of it' on a Tuesday.

Tim is reasonably representative of his group in that he dislikes study, and that his paid work interferes with his unpaid work. For him, the paid work is the more important. Interestingly enough, he also feels that his study gets in the way likewise. That he works at McDonald's is also reasonably common, both to males and females of this group. Like other 'City Folk' males, he believes that it is his capacity to work that will get him a full time job in the end, not his TAFE results, and hence he places great priority upon his unpaid work. Tim's course of study, the carpentry & joinery pre-apprentice program, takes up four days of his week, the fifth he is left to his own devices. In choosing to work unpaid for experience Tim must find his own builder and do such work without governmental assistance or insurance.

Box Hill

The need to have qualifications was recognised by all respondents. While the work experience is regarded as valuable, the key for getting the job is to have the qualification. Furthermore the majority expected that they would have to continue to train or study once they were employed. This was not a prospect that pleased some. Several remarked on how much they wanted a break from study after the rigourss of Year 12, this need exacerbated by their respective demanding TAFE courses. Some hoped that once completed, one qualification would be adequate.

Regency

Regency students regard working part time as a valuable experience, irrespective of the type of job. They feel that employers wish to see young people being productive and responsible, so their resumes must show this. Working part time has a short term benefit – an income – but in the long term its purpose is also beneficial, in that the employer can see their qualifications plus their industriousness, independence and initiative. From this, applicants stand a better chance of securing full time employment in the future.

The focus for most now is to procure a job related course, particularly an apprenticeship or traineeship, as they see that such a job would enhance their performance at TAFE – gaining practical experience – and increase employment opportunities in the future from the practical experience. They anticipate that the employer could act as a referee in future job applications, and make positive recommendations.

Because part time work is not trade related, as it focuses on the retail and hospitality industries, most participants see their jobs as temporary expedients, with no connection to their career pathways. Those participants who are working in course related jobs do not expect their current employers to employ them on a full time, permanent basis once a qualification is gained. Most are aspiring to work in larger companies.

Study and jobs – coherence, convergence or disjuncture

Riverina

There is no need to break into the student types ('Farmers. Townies and Big Town Folk') – across the sample the paid jobs are but a means to an end for these students. Each respondent perceives differing values from their current employment but it is the rarity, not the rule, that the source of income is also a career related and valued job. Some students, more female than male, can see some coherence in that their job may provide skills or experience leading to their desired careers, however few declared it with optimism.

On the other hand, unpaid employment, work undertaken by students on their own initiative or with TAFE guidance, was frequently looked upon as important and it was this work that was seen as providing the most promising route to the desired career.

Box Hill

The broad pattern to emerge here was that most students perceived their current jobs as unrelated to their career choices. Most students seemed to be working for financial reasons and they took whatever jobs were available, or they were continuing in jobs they had held for some time.

In previous sections, the importance many students attach to being employed has been noted; they see this as enhancing their future 'employability' whether in a career-related field or not.

The aspect of practical placements in a course, and the opportunities respondents believe this experience might open up for them, is undoubtedly viewed by some as a 'career-related' component of the course. This was particularly apparent for the dance and theatre studies students.

A Case Study: Box Hill

Liz is studying the Diploma of Library-Information Technology – 18 hours a week. This course also has a practical placement component of 100 hours. Liz is married with children. She is currently not in paid work. She has been out of the workforce for two years. She has had various jobs, including receptionist and flight attendant. She always wanted to travel, but she found the receptionist work "woefully boring". She never considered an academic career.

She has thought about returning to the workforce for some time and hopes the course will help build her confidence and enable her to become more "technologically proficient". She found out about the course by ringing around and doing her own research. A Careers Centre was helpful in this regard.

Studying at home is very difficult. "I do my research whenever I can. With a family it is very difficult to plan when you can sit down and study. The main thing for me is managing my time and getting used to the routine of study."

Liz hopes that she can drop back to part-time study next year. She wants to have more spare time. Further study is not an option at this stage. She wants to work in school libraries or government agencies. Returning to tourism is also an option. She believes that the qualification opens up numerous employment opportunities for her so she is confident that she will find work.

Overall she has found the institute to be "fairly understanding of the needs of mature age students -there is a reasonable degree of flexibility in the course."

Implications

Riverina

The question was asked of a focus group made up of representatives of each student type (male, female, 'Farmer', 'Townie', 'Big Town Folk'), to describe how they would paint or picture the working and economic environment they were currently on the margins of. From the three unemployed youth invited to give some 'realism' to the proceedings came reality "Shit!... ...lies and shit"; from a student came the comment "dark" and another – over the teleconference line from West Wyalong – "I'm looking at one of those screen saver images with all pipes and things that all go somewhere but you can never really follow it, its like that...". Others made similar response, but perhaps the most interesting was this comment from a female student: "...its like one of those... you know.... fun park horror halls... ...when you go in its all dark and there are lots of doors but you're not sure where they go... ... and they're all locked, and you need to know the passwords... ...but they're secret....and nobody will tell us what they are."

The basic implications from this study so far are thus reasonably simple, we must tell the students what the passwords are. However there is a catch, they have become so secret we no longer know them ourselves.

Farmers

In the 'Farmers' case for example, there are simply few jobs in those areas unless the student intends to return to the farm. In most cases, male interviewees were intending to do just that. Most females however had their sights set elsewhere. Yet to get 'out there', be it to a bigger town or city, was not proving easy. In addition, gaining the necessary qualifications wasn't easy, as small campuses tend to offer only short courses or the 'old standard'.

One possibility is to provide delivery of generic components of courses for regional campuses and, either through virtual classroom technology or through block release to major campuses (and/or combinations of the latter), deliver the outstanding course requirements.

This, however, does not answer the core problem: how to provide genuine work experience in a chosen field that could act as a pathway to employment. A solution to this problem does not immediately present itself. Sadly for those regions however, if a solution is not found the youth will find it for us, by leaving;

The current youth solution is to move to towns and big towns to solve or avoid problems.

Townies

The problem here is similar to the farming areas, only with fewer 'natural' solutions for males. Implications for VET are thus similar, excepting that governmental incentives for employers to take on youth in a paid format for work experience would, according to the students themselves, help a great deal. It would also allow for some 'reality' to be felt by both employer and student in that:

- they are at least receiving some reward for the effort put in
- it reduces the stress of having to finance themselves with one job and gain experience with another

Flexible education provision does not really appear as if it would be of great benefit to the majority of these students – however a more flexible course structure might. Courses currently lead to qualifications, but qualifications are not leading to jobs.

The current youth solution is to move to big towns and cities to solve or avoid problems.

Big Town Folk

While jobs themselves are almost as difficult to find in these regions as in the previous two regions, there is far greater variation available, particularly in unpaid work experience. The problem is thus not one of getting the students to the experience, but in providing a flexible training framework into which such students can fit both the experiences and the relevant training. Again, funding of this currently unpaid work experience would assist both males and females of the group, possibly more so than any changes to contemporary VET delivery modes. As mentioned for the 'Townies' above, course relevancy is also questionable.

The current youth solution is to move to cities or give up – nowhere to run to.

Box Hill

A particular strand of comment that emerged from the focus groups concerned employer attitudes and the inability to find work.

A number of students talked about employers expecting them to be sitting by the phone during the day waiting for their call to come in and work. Some students had been knocked back because they did not have the relevant experience. About this one said "We are caught in a 'Catch 22' situation. We can't work during the day because of our course, but they (employers) expect us to have the experience. They have unrealistic expectations to expect us to have qualifications and experience. "

What effect was this having on the students? They spoke about the frustrations of having to rely on their parents. For some it meant that they could no longer run their cars. Their social lives were also affected. They talked about having to refocus their goals for the year so that they worried less about the financial situations they were in. It also came across that employers considered the Victorian Certificate of Education to be the minimum requirement for effective entry into the workforce. A couple of these students said that they would rather be working, but they had accepted the fact that "you can't get anywhere without the qualification".

Regency

The Schools of Engineering and Health and Community Services are constantly involved in

industry liaison – modules must be both nationally and industry approved. Most participants in this come from trade related courses.

In 1996 a VISA (VET in SACE Arrangements – SACE being the SA Certificate of Education) program was introduced to a selection of government schools in a region of which Regency TAFE is a part. Regency is linked and involved in this VISA program with ten government schools. The aim of VISA is for VET modules to be delivered to these schools.Three of Regency's campuses are located in a low socio-economic region, where youth unemployment is high and there are associated social problems. VISA funding is concentrated in this region. From the interviews, it can be concluded that the VISA program should be extended to all schools irrespective of economic conditions, as it broadens student choices in senior high school; a factor which all participants mentioned was missing when discussing their school years. They felt they were disadvantaged because they were not interested in university studies, and their senior years were both a 'waste of time' and 'boring'. This was reflected in their performance at school, and attitudes toward part time work – a preferred option.

Part time work as a concept was an accepted step to take once one turned 15, however if the school system catered to the needs of ALL students, maybe the option would not be as 'preferred' as it was. Once a part time job was found, participants simply continued in it without many qualms, accepting it as a 'matter of life'.

A Case Study: Regency

Josh is an 18 year old first year full time student, studying in the Advanced Certificate in Electronic Engineering. He lives at home.

Josh is currently working in an electronics servicing and retail firm, and considers himself fortunate to be working part time in a field closely associated with his course of studies. He has been working with his current employers for a year, six months of which was on a full time basis, having left school midway in Year 11. With the help of the school career adviser, he organised a resume, approached his current employer, and succeeded in gaining full time employment. He loves his job, particularly working in the servicing department. He works a total of 19 hours a week.

Josh referred to himself as a "discipline problem at school" but also asks: if so, why is he achieving well now within his current course, as well as being respected at work? Personal achievement and progress was in fact the focus of Josh's conversation. It was quite apparent that this year is the first time that he feels he is doing something constructive for himself, by himself, and is proud of it. This is particularly important to him, having gone against most advice he was given "to at least finish Year 12".

Josh was quite satisfied working full time, and did not particularly desire to return to study. It became clear to him, via third year part time TAFE electronics students, that without any qualifications and formal training he would possibly stagnate in his job, and never achieve a promotion or future avenues into other companies. Experience was not the only ingredient for "opening doors for me in the future". Josh regards working in a course related field as very important: he gets to put theory into practice at work and is able to apply his work experience in his practical modules to always be ahead of the rest of the students in the class.

Josh feels that life at the moment is being delivered to him exactly as he wants, both within his course and his part time work: "life could not be better" Josh does not feel it will be necessary for him to study after he completes TAFE. He believes his current luck will deliver him a satisfying job in a large company, or ideally work on a team designing new electronic innovations.

For Josh, as indeed for most students interviewed:

- part time work is not an impediment to progress in their TAFE course as all considered that. this, their first year, is stress-free compared to the demands of senior school
- succeeding at TAFE is their first priority, and should their part time work hinder such success in the future, all indicated that they would cut back their part time hours

Findings from student surveys

AS A PRELUDE TO the second and third phases of the research project, the local researchers identified important findings and issues that had emerged in the course of their investigations. These findings are presented here in summary form.

Riverina

- Females operate very differently to males in country areas in both work and study.
- Females and males in the larger towns, while they statistically are very similar in their approaches to work and study, actually view the process almost as if in a mirror. For females, study is the priority and route to employment. For males, work is the gateway and study almost an irrelevancy – even when that study is specifically aimed at the desired career.
- There are major differences between rural, town, and major town or city youth, and these differing attitudes and needs may not be reconcilable in one governmental policy.
- The male youth of small towns cannot be accessed by this research methodology (which assumes access to work of some kind) and hence their needs are not being truly accounted for.
- The aboriginal youth (male and female) have needs of their own, much as do the male youth of small towns, and again cannot be accessed by this research methodology.
- Current government and/or TAFE workplace insurance policy actively hinders valid work experiences sought by youth.
- While courses lead to qualifications or major parts thereof, these qualifications are not leading to jobs.

Box Hill

- The majority of students are working and studying. This is seen as being a fairly standard or accepted thing to be doing. Many of them have been working for several years. A number of these students are still employed in jobs they have held since the middle years of school. Some of them are in jobs that relate directly to their studies – this is considered to be something of an advantage for future employment prospects. Generally students do not seem unduly worried if this is not the case; the key factor is simply being able to get a job, and staying employed throughout the duration of their course. If this means working odd hours or long shifts on weekends, then so be it.
- The majority of students felt that they were coping or managing to successfully combine their study and work. However work demands are significant for many students. For some it is having a negative impact on their study.
- Students are generally optimistic about their future employment options. TAFE courses are preferred for their vocational focus.
- High proportions of students are working in retail trades and service industries.
- Students who are unable to find work are frustrated and worried about how they are going to cope.
- Parents were supporting their children in several ways. (e.g. transport to and from campus, career advice, paying expenses or 'topping up ' students when the need arose).

- The majority of students are satisfied with the quality of the teaching and the course design. Some students thought that delivery needed to be more 'flexible' in order to cater for those working during the day.
- There is evidence of students who have completed higher education degrees coming to TAFE to improve their employment options.
- The proximity of the campus is an important consideration for many students.

Regency

- Part time work was not found to be a result of dissatisfaction with school or family needs. Participants wanted to spend more on their personal indulgences, and their jobs later became important to them as:
  - an avenue or form of 'escape' from the pressures of senior school studies, when they could see they were not achieving the desired results
  - an alternative for them to possibly increase hours to full time in case of poor results
  - being already employed, students saw their employment opportunities enhanced once they left school, based on the belief that employers prefer to hire those with work experience
- Part time work was a natural step to take once one he turned 15, a pragmatic and expedient move.
- Those who were not in course related jobs wished they were, and some were working towards achieving that goal.

Overall Findings

Up to two-thirds of the students surveyed were in some form of either paid or unpaid employment. The majority work on average two or more days per week. Only 14 per cent had no intention of working while studying. They were aware that future employment now depends on both qualifications and experience, and so they saw their involvement in both paid and unpaid work as a necessary means to establishing a work record for themselves, to complement their eventual training qualifications.

Although the majority of students regarded their study and work combination as a 'fact of life', (apart from those with apprenticeships), they saw little formal connection between the two. Their courses are one part of their life, their work situations another, and this lack of formal connection appears to be promoted as a 'fact of life' by both their training institutions and their employers.

The 144 interviews brought out in much clearer detail the complexity of the study and work combinations in the three different localities. It was generally agreed that being in the workforce did, of itself, enhance one's chances of finding work in one's chosen field. Paid work was a stated need by all concerned, while unpaid work was a chosen strategy aimed at gaining a foothold in a desired career, a chance to gain experience and to 'prove oneself'. As one respondent said: "It all looks good on your resume!". Combining study and work was also viewed as essential for respondents who are looking to 'upskill' or move into new career paths.

What is most striking is, on the one hand, the wide range of work-related competencies and experience that are evident in their stories, and yet, on the other hand, the fact that there is little or no recognition of this in their training – with the result that some of them do not even recognise it themselves.

In the interview and focus group data there were also indications of disappointment and disillusionment at having to do it all for themselves, with no real recognition from either their colleagues or their employers. Thus as one female student put it: "...it's like one of those... you know.... fun park horror halls... ...when you go in its all dark and there are lots of doors but you're not sure where they go... ... and they're all locked, and you need to know the passwords... but they're secret....and nobody will tell us what they are."

Follow-up student questionnaire; briefings

THE SECOND PHASE of the project was designed as a follow-up to the main issues raised during the initial phase. It had two components to it:

- a follow-up questionnaire to explore in greater depth issues raised in phase one
- the preparation of a briefing report for local consultations with staff and management personnel concerning the course implications of the findings

The second questionnaire

The second questionnaire set out to investigate further the situation of TAFE students in terms of their work and study, and how both interrelate. In addition, specific questions on course structure and content were put forward in the survey to ascertain student attitudes on the relationship between their particular courses and their own work situations. The sample set out to cover a wider spectrum of students, across the different years of study, rather than focusing on first-year students. This widening of the sample was achieved, but due to course pressures during second semester the survey was restricted to a smaller number of participants overall.

Of the final sample (N=509), more than two-thirds (67.6 per cent) were in full-time study; 22.4 per cent were in apprenticeship programs; 23.4 per cent of the respondents were in their first year of study. There were 177 (or 35 per cent) females, and of the total sample, 37 per cent were over 20 years of age. Relevant findings from the second questionnaire are presented below.

Choosing VET

In choosing to do a TAFE/VET course, respondents have a strong expectation that there will be a link between their study and the work they hope to attain after they have finished. Asked to rank the reasons as to their choosing TAFE/VET in terms of their importance to the respondents' circumstances, a majority of the sample saw the qualification and the carry-over of study into work from TAFE/VET as high or very high in importance.

Reasons for choosing TAFE/VET course of study (%)

Reason	very high	high	medium	low
To gain an initial qualification	59	26	7	2
To help me get a job	55	19	10	6
For personal development	21	27	21	17
To retrain for a different career	17	13	20	33
As required by my employer	15	10	9	43

For full-time students, over two-thirds of them (68 per cent) place an emphasis on their studies as very important in helping to get a job. This is less so for apprentices, where only 38.9 per cent see their TAFE/VET studies as very important in getting a job – this could be explained by the fact that they are already placed in on-the-job training when they undertake their study. For both full-time and apprentice students, there is a relatively high ratio of respondents who believe that gaining an initial qualification in important.

Work Situation

Approximately two-thirds were in some form of paid employment at the time of the survey, with an additional ten per cent taking on unpaid work in some form. Of those employed – paid or unpaid – there was a high proportion working close to two or more working days a week.

Hours worked

Hours a week in employment	No
1 to 5 hours/week	37
6 to 9 hours/week	41
10 to 15 hours/week	101
over 15 hours/week	186

Apprentices make up a large number of the group working 15 or more hours a week (57.5 per cent) – reflecting the nature of their studies where work at nearly full-time status and study are closely linked. Forty six per cent of full-time students are working more than ten hours a week. While 82.5 per cent of the apprentices believe that their work is directly related to their course of study at TAFE, only 15 per cent of respondents studying full-time or part-time felt the same.

Implications of study and work combinations

Priorities in terms of work and study show that there are mixed attitudes for those who are doing both. Study is a lower priority than work. While there is a large proportion of respondents who would prefer to both study and work, there are also those who would prefer to be just working without having to study.

Attitudes to Combinations

Combining Work and Study (N = 387)	No	%
Work takes priority	64	17
Need the work but prefer not to	58	15
Actually prefer to do both	126	33
Prefer to work without having to study	120	31
Prefer to study without having to work	60	16

In breaking down these figures by the respondents' mode of study, it is possible to discern that the apprentice group are vocationally oriented – 45 per cent preferring to work rather than study, and 28 per cent identifying work as taking priority, while only 4.5 per cent would prefer to study without the work. For the full-time students, there is a more mixed approach throughout the group – 26.2 per cent would prefer to work without study, while another 21.3 per cent would prefer to study without the work.

Another contrast between the two groups of students shows in the fact that 20 per cent of full-time students who are working would prefer not to be, whereas only 3.6 per cent of the working apprentices felt this way. In general, the apprentice group could be representative of a vocational or work focus in their approach to work and study. The full-time students are more representative of a mixed approach – while many of them work, it is not necessarily their first choice in employment, and many would be just as happy to study as work. By these two different general approaches to work and study, a vocational focus and a mixed approach, it is possible to analyse the perceptions of VET/TAFE courses from the respondents regarding what they want from their course.

In canvassing their opinions on their TAFE/VET study, three quarters of the sample agreed that their study is useful for working after they have finished the course.

Opinions on TAFE/VET study and combinations with work (%)

	strongly agree	agree	no opinion	disagree	strongly disagree
Useful for future employment	40	35	12	1	4
Should be more practical	5	30	32	9	2
(Study) is my main priority	20	35	23	7	2
Links well with job I have	11	16	31	12	4
More courses should combine study with work	7	37	35	7	3
Teachers should help in finding study-related jobs as part of course	22	30	31	6	2

In comparing the two study modes, full-time and apprentice groups, there are some general parallels in opinions of the actual courses. Eighty four per cent of full-time students agreed (strongly or otherwise) that their study is useful for future employment, 71.4 per cent of apprentices were of a similar opinion. While 55.1 per cent of the full-time students agree or strongly agree that work needs to be better integrated into VET/TAFE courses, 42 per cent of apprentices felt the same way. The lower rate of agreement on these opinions for apprentices could be explained, once again, by the close links between work and study that already exist for this group in their course.

There are two major differences of opinion, however, between these two groups of students. 69.9 per cent of full-time students agree or strongly agree that their present post-school study is their main priority, compared to only 39.8 per cent of apprentices. 69.9 per cent of apprentices agree or strongly agree that their study links well with their present employment, while only 21.6 per cent of full-time students have the same opinion.

Using the two study-modes as points of reference for two study and vocational patterns – those with a work focus and those with a mixed approach – it is possible to make some comments on their expectations and life-choices. The apprentices, as work focused, have an established vocational choice. Their time in VET/TAFE is a required part of their apprenticeship, which will allow them to pursue their chosen career-track. While some of them would prefer to be just working, the figures show that a majority understand that their study and resulting qualifications will help them in their present training scheme.

For full-time students, there is the expectation that their study will help them in the future. For those who are working at present, less than ten per cent see their study as useful in their job. This would tend to show that very few of them are working at the moment in jobs for which they are studying – they have taken on employment to help finance their study. Thus, while the work is important to them, study is the main priority for over two-thirds. As a result, 62.7 per cent of them agree or strongly agree that finding work related to their study should be a part of their course – work and study should be closely integrated – compared to just 35.8 per cent of the apprentice group.

Briefing issues

The third or final phase of the project was to be a process of consultation with local staff and management, to explore the implications of findings from the initial two phases. In preparation for this, a summary of the main issues raised by the study was made, and a briefing report was prepared for distribution prior to the local consultations.

The briefing report indicated that, at all sites, the main issues which had emerged were the nature and quality of the relationship between work and study. It seemed ironic that despite the fact that the students in this study are enrolled in vocational education and training, the links between these components are not explored or even seen as working in the students' interests. There were two main identifiable approaches to work and study amongst the students: those with a vocational focus (they have a specific type of job or career in mind and thus see their current jobs as purely temporary), and those with a mixed focus (for whom study and work are equally important to establish credentials for future career outcomes). However, for both groups, there appeared in their courses to be no recognisable link between their current experience of work and study.

Specific issues raised for consultation at each of the participating institutes were:

Potential for closer linkage between study and work

Students are struggling to make the links between their current studies, work credentials and their future goals. The 'pathways' are not clear, despite their own attempts to forge real links between 'work and study'. Some of the courses offered at Regency are linked with industry – the Schools of Engineering and Health and Community Services for example. These schools are constantly involved in industry liaison, and participants in the courses come from trade related courses. However, in other areas, one of the problems is how to provide genuine work experience in a chosen field to act as a link to a career. In all courses, closer attention needs to be paid in course design to integrate the students' study and work experiences.

Investigation of partnerships with local industry

Regency has some campuses in areas of high unemployment. This means that there are unlikely to be jobs in the local area. This creates a barrier to employment that remains a frustrating issue for many students and their families. Currently, youth at Riverina 'solve' this problem by leaving the area and moving to larger towns or cities in order to get jobs. This factor raises the question of the relationship between each of the TAFE institutes and the local business, industries and employers. Where possible, greater cooperative relationships between education and training and employers should be sought. Given that the TAFEs are especially important to the regional area, because they allow many students to gain an education without leaving home, it could be a priority to gain support from local employers to have a commitment to employing TAFE students.

The quality of work experience

Even during their studies, students felt the lack of a meaningful relationship between courses and work experience. As one student from Box Hill said: "We are caught in a 'Catch 22' situation. We can't work during the day because of our course, but they (employers) expect us to have the experience. They have unrealistic expectations to expect us to have the qualifications and experience". On the other hand, students reported that employers were at times unsympathetic about the real demands and requirements of study. The quality of work experience needs to be addressed. Even where students are not working in an area that relates directly to their studies, there are significant areas of learning that can be activated. For example, many businesses and industries, especially those in rural areas, are undergoing structural change. It would be of benefit for TAFE students, regardless of their occupational orientation, to learn 'on the job' about change in the workplace. Employers can take a greater role in fostering this approach.

Responsiveness to changing gender patterns

Across all sites, gender patterns replicate the traditional divisions between 'women's work' and 'men's work'. The strength of the gender patterning suggests that at all three TAFE sites, there may be an issue emerging about the extent to which the institutions attempt to open up areas of study to non-traditional groups, and to support students in workplaces – especially where young women are entering the traditional 'male' trades.

Consultations with staff

One of the stated aims of this research study was to examine the implications for VET program design and delivery in the increasing trend for students to undertake their own study and work combinations. To achieve this aim, it was decided to rely on the assessment by local staff and management personnel of the interim findings of the study. This led to the development of a series of conclusions about future developments in response to the study and work combinations of VET students.

Consultations

It was important to 'test' the research findings against the perspectives of key teachers, managers and others at the local level. Their comments and reflections would form an essential part of the final report. To provide some focus for the local consultations the following three discussion questions were distributed in advance to the likely participants:

1. If combined study and work pathways are now becoming the norm for VET students, to what extent are VET providers taking the combinations into account in their student advice and course organisation, and in ensuring that the students are coping effectively with those combinations?

2. Are there opportunities for innovation within existing programs, which might allow for, or even formally incorporate, the study and work combinations being developed independently by individual students?

3. Is there also the possibility that the initiatives of the students with local employers could provide an opening for formal VET and industry partnerships between those employers and the students' TAFE institutions?

In December 1998 these questions were put to local staff and management personnel at each of the three sites.

Riverina

The local consultation was attended by six staff, including the on-site researcher, Glenn Costin. The staff included training consultants, management, a representative from counselling services and a teacher in general education.

The increasing tendency for students to combine study and work was seen to pose challenges for both the students and for TAFEs. Different points of view were offered about the meaning of this phenomenon. Some saw a distinction between work 'for the money', and work that was specifically and consciously undertaken to link up with their study. 'Is it work where they want to earn some money, or is it work where they've moved on from earning?' Others were interested in understanding how TAFE could shift its approach in order to 'take the person into account'. It was suggested that an overly-rigid focus on 'skills' and 'competencies' from the TAFE staff may create a difficulty for the introduction of VET into TAFE, because not all VET courses are skill and job specific, but focus on workplaces.

Staff pointed out that as an educational environment, TAFE has the advantage of being a "better environment" for at risk students because "they are treated as mature people. School is only part of their lives, TAFE is more real for them – it provides relevance."

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) was seen as potentially an important way of recognising the extent of young people's work experience. However, it was felt that young students at Riverina TAFE tended to seriously underestimate their work skills and experience, and hence did not make full use of this opportunity to link study and work.

The tension between providing training that takes full account of young people's experiences and lives, and training that focuses on skills or competencies was discussed. TAFE staff were critical of local employers who "if they are coordinating traineeships, they will invariably keep the trainee in one working spot, they are not given employment skills except in one area". Currently, because apprentices are funded 80 per cent, "employers will keep them in one working spot. As a result, trainees are becoming job-ready – they are acquiring job skills – rather than becoming employment-ready, acquiring all-round employment skills."

One solution to the tensions involved in meeting both student and employer needs was seen to be a greater role for the TAFE in liaison between employers who provide training (and employment) and students. An example of this at Riverina is the bricklaying course, in which local bricklayers were approached and asked to factor the cost of apprentices into their costs. As a result, three apprentices were employed on a rotation basis through local bricklayer businesses, ensuring they received an all-round knowledge of their trade.

Box Hill

The consultation was attended by twelve staff, including representatives from management (planning and pathways, quality management) research, careers advice, multimedia and television and education training, educational services, teacher information technology, curriculum program development. The on site researcher was not able to attend.

The issue of students' experiences of study and work was seen to be a matter of differentiating between two major classifications of students: those who are working for survival – just for the money, and those who are working for their vocational interests. It was suggested that students were on the wrong track in attempting to see links between study and work – students still think that jobs will be gained through study, whereas they haven't had the experience.

Discussion also focused on the approaches taken by many employers who failed to take their training responsibilities seriously, and simply saw young workers or apprentices as cheap labour. It was pointed out that the students were being 'ripped off' in circumstances where: "These courses and apprenticeships are being sold to students in giving them competencies in their chosen work and career, but they're forced to work in one particular task all day and they get 'taught' after hours". Others commented that the best situations were those where there was a structural involvement with large numbers of employers and employees, so that the quality of the learning can be monitored. For smaller businesses, the different arrangements and variations make it hard to deal with a diverse array of student situations. In these situations, students are more likely to be 'stuck' in one position for the duration of their apprenticeship.

RPL was seen to be a limited option, although here young students were understood to have a good grasp of the potential of RPL. One of its limitations was that even though students may be eligible to claim RPL credit for components of their courses, they would prefer to take the module in order to maintain their eligibility for Austudy.

With regard to the responsiveness of TAFE to student circumstances, there was a range of responses. In many courses, the response to students' work and study combinations has been to offer students more flexible timetables. For example, in the hairdressing and floristry course, full-fee-paying students can come into TAFE on any day of the week they like.

Discussion also turned to the more complex issue of the concept of training. There is a conceptual assumption in the apprenticeship system where the students must develop a certain set of skills through their work – this is undermining the traditional learning and teaching mode. For the new apprenticeship scheme, learning and training is happening, but outside the normal working hours. Employers are seeing it as something separate from 'the realities of work.' In training packages offered by industries, there are fundamental competencies which underlie the whole course, and these are employer and industry driven.

There was some dissatisfaction with the relationship between TAFE courses and industry. "Employers are training them in job skills rather than employment skills. If education and training keeps going in this direction, it will end up like the McDonald's scheme, where people can work anywhere in the world but only in a particular job or industry (i.e. managers are trained in particular skills while behind the counter workers learn how to cook French fries)."

It was also suggested that industry representatives feel that they do not have enough consultation with TAFEs over the nature of training programs.

Gender issues were also raised. Young women tend to complete the HSC pathways course at TAFE more than the young men, however the choice of course remains gender segregated.

It was felt that in the future, "TAFE/VET providers will need to adjust to the working lifestyle of full fee-paying students, rather than full fee-paying students adjusting to the 9 to 5 lifestyle of the providers".

Regency

The consultation was attended by seven staff, including the on-site researcher, Lidia Towsty. Participants included representatives from senior management, student counselling, mechanical and electrical engineering and gender equity.

Initially, discussion focused on the extent to which the institution offers flexible delivery to accommodate student preferences. For example, on-line delivery was being emphasised, with 50 per cent of programs aiming to be offered 'on-line' by the year 2000. It was noted that even full-time students are taking up the option to do night classes, because they have part-time jobs during the day. The electrical engineering courses attempt to offer RPL as much as possible, but they are hampered in this, because the job skills that they train students in are very specific.

It was suggested that the full-time students in particular tend to take any jobs they can get, and they are not necessarily related to their area of study at all. For example, an electrical engineering student who is also a training manager at a large retail store has significant work skills, which would be relevant to any workplace, but these cannot be easily recognised in the current course structure, because 'competencies' are defined very narrowly and specifically.

It was suggested that most TAFE courses in the 1990s still focus on job skills in the narrow sense, not on work. In this sense, TAFE is seen to be structured around 1960s and 1970s concepts of industry-training links. The current system, it was suggested, does not serve students well and nor does it serve employers interests well.

For example, in television maintenance work, currently particular skills are in demand, and students who gain these skills tend to get work easily at the moment. Skill-Shares and private providers have tended to respond to this training need, but they are training people in very narrow-band skills, which are not easily transferable.

It was suggested that many employers would like to operate on the basis of a broader concept of work skills, using a work-based rather than a narrow skills approach to the workplace. Barriers to this approach include small businesses which see employees in a short-term role only, and the national curriculum which mandates the teaching of particular (narrow) skills and competencies. In one sense, the national curriculum disenfranchises employers from the process.

Riverina institute is also interested in monitoring the gender issue. It was felt that small businesses are slower to 'catch on' to gender equity issues, and that in the use of new technologies old gender divisions are being reproduced. For example, women are being trained alongside men in computer skills, but women 'drop out' when they acquire the lowest level of skill, because employers recruit them for the lower echelons of their operations. Men tend to continue their studies to get higher qualifications with a view to entering employment at a higher level.

Implications

The result of the consultations with staff needs to be placed alongside the results of the research on students. The discussions with local staff and management personnel suggest that while students' understandings of the relationship between employment and study have shifted, many TAFE staff continue to operate on the basis of outmoded conceptions. If TAFEs are to continue to provide a positive and relevant post-compulsory education and training environment for students in the future, the 'thinking' of its key personnel will need to undergo change.

New approaches to study and work

At each TAFE site, an initial response to the issue of students' study and work combinations was dismissive. As the consultation proceeded, a more complex understanding of the implications of work and study emerged. However, the view, summed up at Box Hill, that there are 'two classifications of students' is pervasive. It runs counter to the evidence from the research on students: that the vast majority of students see their work experience as 'vocational', however tenuous the relationship may appear to others.

In whose interests?

The consultations with TAFE staff also reveal a tension between serving the students' best interests and meeting the needs of industry. This tension is revealed in the frequent reference to the problem of training for a 'job' rather than 'work', of narrow 'competencies' rather than 'employment skills'. It is this narrow conception of education and training that poses the greatest barrier to more fully recognising the wide range of employment experiences the students possess. As the discussion from Regency institute reveals, there is a view that the tendency to train for narrow skills rather than for workplaces is a legacy of a previous era, and it is time to move on, in the interests of both students and employers.

Old divisions

Staff at each site were aware of the extent to which gender remains a source of division. Young women continue to choose to participate in a narrow range of courses, such as hairdressing, childcare and hospitality. Employer approaches are also relevant, with evidence from Regency that in areas such as computing, women are seen as a source of labour for the lower ranks of an organisation. Here too, TAFEs are caught between serving the interests of students and responding to the wishes of employers, and may have a more significant role in the future in finding ways of operating in the best interests of industry and employees.

The consultations with TAFE staff, on the whole, reveal a level of frustration with the current system, and a willingness to 'rethink' the role which TAFE might play in the future. Clearly, new relationships with industry need to be forged, in which students' evident abilities to work across diverse occupations and to learn multiple skills are recognised and integrated into the education and training programs.

Conclusions

NORMALLY A REPORT of this kind would end with some brief assessment of how effectively the research had fulfilled its stated aims. In this case, however, the findings have opened up some crucial theoretical considerations about the appropriateness of current policy settings concerning vocational education and training. It is important, therefore, to draw attention to this before making final comments on our findings.

Questions of policy

The education and labour market experience of the post-1970 generation has some distinctive features which differentiate it from earlier generations. In Australia, they are the first generation for whom extensive participation in post-compulsory education has become the majority experience, and they are the ones who have grown to adulthood facing a collapsed youth labour market which has at best promised only part-time or casual work – but work that is overwhelmingly taken up by the students amongst them.

In commenting on a similar situation overseas, the Canadian scholars, CÛtÉ and Allehar (1994), call them a 'generation on hold' because of the ways in which for them the traditional 'transitions' to adulthood and careers have been deferred. Our own research findings (Dwyer & Wyn 1998), as well as recent British and European studies (Furlong & Cartmel 1997; Evans & Heinz 1994), suggest instead that they are a 'generation of choice' – they are becoming increasingly pro-active in the face of risk and uncertainty of outcomes, and trying their best to negotiate or 'navigate' their own adult pathways for themselves. There is considerable evidence that they are making whatever pragmatic choices are necessary to enable them to maintain their aspirations by taking up the opportunities which occur in the meantime.

If that is the case, it certainly raises doubts about policy considerations that perpetuate a linear sequential model of 'pathways from school to work' in which work begins when study is over, or in which this generation's educational participation is planned for and discussed with little attention being paid to the fact that even full-time students now see themselves as part of the workforce, and negotiate their study commitments with that in mind.

This seems particularly important given the significant changes that have taken place in labour market policy over the past decade. The complex choices these students are making raise important issues which indicate that in a surprising way they are perhaps more 'in tune' with recent changes in workplace practices than their training institutions give them credit for. They are aware of the need to demonstrate to future employers that they bring with them both training qualifications and established employment experience. They have developed an approach to life that suits them to work situations in which the organisation of work around the planning, management and completion of pragmatic arrangements directed at specific projects is becoming more important in professional and technical fields. They accept the need to be 'flexible' and multi-skilled, and their readiness to negotiate work arrangements is certainly compatible with new forms of workplace agreements. They are already developing in their current jobs the kinds of work-related competencies they are told about in their courses. For many of them these may be reluctant choices, but they appear to have come to terms with the realities facing them, even if only on pragmatic grounds.

Choice biographies

These developments in the lives of the post-1970 generation point to both new experiences and new understandings of young people's transitions into adulthood, which have serious implications for established notions of 'pathways from study to work'. What is most significant about these developments is that they are not simply isolated or temporary aspects of the living arrangements of young Australians, but are features shared now by the adult generations – both young and old – of the developed societies of the world. Research findings from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada and Europe confirm Australian data, which show that notions of 'transition' and linear sequences of moving from one stage of life to another no longer accurately reflect real life experience.

At a theoretical level, the German scholar, Ulrich Beck (1992), analyses these developments in terms of the emergence of the 'risk society', and explains them by means of a distinction between the 'normal' biographies of the industrial era and the 'choice' biographies of the last quarter of the twentieth century. It is a useful distinction, particularly because it brings into sharp focus the policy gap affecting current practice in the vocational education and training sector.

The 'normal' biographies of the industrial era presented a linear, and largely predictable, sequence of developmental stages, whereby young people moved from dependence to independence, from school to work, and from adolescence into an adulthood (defined in terms of marriage, family and lifetime career or occupation) similar to that of their parents. The biographies were 'normal' because they developed within a social context shaped by the predictability and assumed permanence, over any one lifetime, of the established institutional structures of the family, education, industry and the labour market. Most of the 'markers' of transition (the age of consent, voting age, adult wage, marriage and parenthood, home ownership, and at the end of the term the age of retirement and pension entitlements) reflected this two-fold assumption about linear and predictable norms.

Even older adults from preceding generations now have in common with the young people of today an increasing exposure to risk and uncertainty in their personal and working lives. They share a shift in life experience, in which the norms of industrial society have been called into question as a result of significant social and economic changes. The elements of predictability, permanence, and separate stages and components of life can no longer be taken for granted as normative aspects of adulthood. Increasingly adults of all ages now find themselves negotiating changes that have affected established institutions and expectations – marriage breakups, retrenchment, new workplace agreements, single parenthood, retraining, flexitime, outsourcing, or intermittent unemployment. Theirs are now 'choice' biographies, and as Beck (1992, p. 135) points out:

"the proportion of the biography which is open and must be constructed personally is increasing. Decisions on education, profession, job, place of residence, spouse, number of children and so forth, with all the secondary decisions implied, no longer can be, they must be made. Even where the word 'decisions' is too grandiose, because neither consciousness nor alternatives are present, the individual will have to 'pay for' the consequences of decisions not taken."

The British scholars, Furlong and Cartmel (1997, p. 6), compare this distinction between 'normal' and 'choice' biographies to the contrast between train and car travel.

"Unlike the railway passenger, the individual car driver is constantly faced with a series of decisions relating to routes which will take them from their point of origin to their destination. They can take the motorway, follow A roads, stick to minor roads, scenic routes, or can follow any combination of these routes. At many junctions, they can switch routes and may decide to change roads due to difficulties in making progress on roads previously selected."

Thus in the 1990s, it is less and less relevant to base education and youth policy on a linear and sequential model of youth. Increasingly, for young people, becoming adult is a negotiated reality and the transitions after high school do not form a predetermined and predictable sequence from one discrete type of reality to another beyond it. In particular, for them study and work are not conceptualised as two end-points of a continuum. Rather the post-1970 generation are negotiating an adult reality for themselves, utilising study and work as constitutive complementary elements. If, then, we acknowledge the contrast between the predetermined journeys of the past and the ways young people must now negotiate their own futures, it is important to ask which side of the contrast is reflected in current policy principles and practice concerning the 'pathways from study to work'.

The policy gap

In the past, combinations of study and work have mainly been conceptualised with reference to the apprenticeship system. The incidence of 'non-apprentice' workplace participation and full-time student status was given little attention, perhaps because it was not seen as a mainstream phenomenon. Under the terms of 'normal' biographies, it was assumed that, if full-time students also had occasional or part-time jobs, it was as a source of income. The difference now is that while income is still a major consideration for the current generation of students, there is now an added rationale – the need to demonstrate, within the restructured labour market, work-preparedness, competencies, and work-experience as employment credentials. The tendency for some VET personnel in the local consultations to claim that students are only working 'for the money' suggests that they are either unaware of, or seeking to downplay, this added rationale.

This was evident too in a tendency to reduce the discussion of study and work combinations to issues concerning apprenticeships. This continuing assumption that work and study combinations are only of major importance – for example, under the rubric of User Choice – within the apprenticeship system ignores the fact that the vast majority of VET participants are not apprentices. Yet for all participants – because of the new demands of the labour market – work and study combinations are crucial. As Kinsman has pointed out – it needs to be emphasised that individual voluntary and non-sponsored participation in training by individuals represents by far the major activity of formal VET institutions. (The apprentices and trainees for whom User Choice has been crafted constitute somewhat less than 15 per cent of a total enrolment of approximately one million) (Kinsman, 1998, p. 131, italics in original).

Kinsman confirms the evidence about the shift to 'choice' biographies, and makes the point that:

"(T)here is ample conceptual analysis and empirical evidence to show that individuals and enterprises differ in their approach to investment in training (e.g. DEET 1988). An especially important distinction between the training demanded by individuals and that of industry is that training decisions of individuals are directed to achieving flexibility and advancement across occupations and over a relatively long period of time. Particularly since the restructuring of labour markets in the last two decades, the more futures orientation of individuals means that most do not think only in terms of training for their first or next job, they look for a mix of skills which will enhance mobility, and a variety of options. Unlike apprentices therefore, demand of non-sponsored individuals is a demand derived from anticipated rather than completed labour market transactions" (Kinsman, 1998, p. 132, italics in original).

This is an issue that also emerged in a major study of the User Choice scheme. As Ferrier notes:

"A number of different perspectives were presented on the need to achieve a balance in a User Choice scheme between the needs of employers and other users. Often this issue was raised in connection with portability of skills and qualifications. A common concern was the lack of recognition that the needs of students and employers might not always be identical. In particular, a view was put that some employers have very narrow training needs and that addressing these needs only will not necessarily be in the best interests of the students, who may later wish to change employment" (Ferrier, 1998, p. 193).

Both the student responses and the local consultations in our project confirm this concern. Institute personnel drew attention a number of times to the constraints imposed on them and their students by narrow definitions of 'competencies' defined in job-specific terms – 'rather than becoming employment-ready, acquiring all-round employment skills'. The point at stake here is that students are moving beyond the narrow and linear definition of their future working lives in terms of the 'normal' biographies of the past, and are seeking opportunities that enable them to combine work skills and training qualifications that make them responsive to on-going (and unpredictable) changes in their own economic circumstances. Hence their concern about the 'lack of recognition' within their training settings of this shift of perspective.

The evidence from our project supports this line of analysis. The detailed interview transcripts recorded with 144 of the participants from the three different sites demonstrate this. For example, in the case studies included in the section Student interviews, this shift from 'normal' to 'choice' biographies in the lives of the students is distinctive. Even the case studies from Jenny and Ben – who tried to develop 'normal' biographies for themselves – demonstrate how they have had to make changes or postpone their plans, and have come to define their current situation in terms of choices about combinations of study and work. Others from the case studies, such as Amanda or Joseph, have established histories of negotiating choices in their lives, and so they see the importance of maintaining a difficult balance between study and work commitments. We have only provided a small number of case studies, but they are representative of the experiences contained in the 144 interviews. What is most striking is, on the one hand, the wide range of work-related competencies and experience that are evident in their stories, and yet, on the other hand, the fact that there is little or no recognition of this in their training – with the result that some of them do not even recognise it themselves.

It seems ironic that, instead of grasping the opportunity to build on the student-created opportunities, which see flexibility and pragmatic choice as strengths and which place the emphasis on the emergence of flexible and competent 'workers of the future', this shift of perspective is regarded with puzzlement by some VET personnel. This in itself is puzzling, particularly in the light of the fact that one of the main goals of VET policy is the establishment of a national training market characterised by 'responsiveness', and which 'encompasses all of vocational education and training'. Student choices of study and work combinations certainly suggest that at least they see a necessary link between the two and that, at least at a pragmatic level, they are demonstrating their own 'responsiveness' to both training and labour-market forces.

> The training market is intended to bring about responsiveness, diversity, quality and efficiency in training. These are desired goals for the whole of the vocational education and training system, leading to the conclusion that the training market encompasses all of vocational education and training (ANTA, 1996, p. 3).

At an implementation level there is a lost opportunity here – the goal as stated is future-oriented and potentially responsive to new elements of market flexibility and choice on the part of both providers and consumers. However, existing structural arrangements and outmoded understandings about study and work combinations continue to perpetuate barriers between training opportunities and workforce participation.

> Currently the national system of vocational education and training does not adequately recognise or respond to the legitimate demands of these individual users. In particular, the system entrenches its links with current occupational structures and interests, at the expense of the more future orientation, which is increasingly evident as a primary motivator of individual investment and participation in training (Kinsman, 1998, p. 135).

Aims and outcomes

Some final comments are called for with regard to the stated aims of this project. There were seven aims in all.

The type and extent of study and work combinations chosen by the participants.

Overall, there was considerable variation in the type and extent of study and work combinations, which was influenced by the availability of jobs in particular locations. For example, there were some important gender differences in the rural New South Wales sample. Young males from farming communities were more likely to be engaged in paid or unpaid work on the family farm, whereas young females looked elsewhere for jobs, in such areas as child care or retail outlets. Young males from small towns were largely unable to find employment and tended to join their peers in larger towns, where both males and females found occasional or part-time employment in the service sector. In the northern region of Adelaide, employment opportunities for both males and females were restricted, and only 43 per cent of the sample had work of some kind, mainly in retail outlets, with some casual work such as lawn mowing, babysitting, or as attendants in car-parks or a sports arena. Hours worked ranged from eight to twenty four hours per week. This range was similar for the Melbourne participants. They were however the most successful in obtained work, with 68 per cent employed, many in jobs they had held for three or four years. Some were working two jobs, but the most common configuration was weekend work including a Thursday or Friday night shift.

The extent to which such combinations are seen as constraints, matters of expediency, or preferred options.

For most, the combination is a fact of life – "what else can you do?" – although there is a degree of dissatisfaction with the limit to the type of jobs available. While the income earned from paid work was an important consideration, some relationship between their current work activities and their future goals in terms of a work record or transferability of skills was acknowledged – "it all looks good on your resume!". The Adelaide sample differed from the others in that almost a quarter (and particularly males) indicated that they would prefer to work without having to study as well, but even so, the Adelaide students agreed that combining study with work was a valuable experience irrespective of the type of job. They felt that employers wish to see young people being productive and responsible, and it improves their chances of future full-time employment.

The relationship between the combinations, and the balance with other personal commitments.

If anything, the combination fitted in well with their other personal commitments, either because they found the study regime less demanding than their schooling had been, or because their jobs provided much-needed income for leisure pursuits, or because they had or made friends both at college and at work. For most, the combination did not interfere too much with their other commitments. However, apart from the apprentices, most saw little relationship between their study and the types of job they had. There were some, mainly males, who regarded their jobs simply as a source of income, and there were few who saw any 'useful' link between their study and work. The link was the result of a double-edged demand on them – to become qualified and to have a work record. They saw little indication that their employers were interested in their studies or that their training institutions were interested in their work.

The degree of difficulty associated with that balance.

A minority identified a degree of difficulty associated with the balance, but most were managing it well, with comments such as: "it's no big deal"; "it's nowhere near as bad as last year (Year 12)"; "pretty happy except when you get lots of work"; "if you stay on track you are okay". Some apprentices, particularly males, showed a definite preference for work rather than study – "The last thing I feel like doing at the end of a long day is getting my head into a book." For others, the main sources of difficulty were not due to the combination as such, but other factors. Thus the rural participants, and also those from metropolitan Melbourne, had real concerns about the time spent travelling – either from home to the college or between college and their place of work. Also, for some the main difficulty was striking a balance between paid and unpaid work – they needed the paid work for financial reasons but also pursued unpaid work – as volunteers or extra hands – that was in line with their future goals; juggling the demands of each was a major factor.

The relationship between current mixed patterns of commitment and expected future outcomes.

Because part time work is not in their career area, as it is mainly limited to the retail and hospitality industries, most participants see their jobs as temporary expedients, with no connection to their career pathways. At the same time, however, they see the job as enhancing their future 'employability' – whether in a career-related field or not. Some New South Wales students, more female than male, see that their job may provide skills or experience leading to their desired careers, however few declared it with optimism. On the other hand, unpaid employment, work undertaken by students on their own initiative or with college guidance, was frequently looked upon as important, and it was this work that was seen as providing the most promising route to the desired career.

Males working on family farms tended to be reasonably positive about their futures, with a perceived security in the solidity of a farm, even if only as a fall back. Males in small towns were not hopeful about future outcomes, but females in small towns seemed to be very good at seeing possibilities and options, and did not suffer from the negativity of their male counterparts, or the females in more outlying areas. In the larger towns, the major difference was that females invariably stated that the study was the main priority, which would get them the position they sought, whereas the males expressed a belief in the capacity of their work experience to gain them their goals and few gave much credit or real value to the course credentials.

In Melbourne, both males and females emphasised the importance of qualifications as the key to the future, and even surmised that they would need to continue to train or study once they were fully employed. In Adelaide, while maintaining a study and work combination is seen as important, the students were keen to gain entry into some kind of course that had a 'job-related' component. Such a job would enhance their study performance, increase employment opportunities in the future, and the employer could act as a referee. This seems consistent with the outlook of those currently working in course-related jobs. They do not expect that their current employers are likely to employ them on a full time, permanent basis once a qualification is gained.

The degree of coherence, convergence or disjuncture between study areas and job choices.

In previous sections the importance many students attach to being employed has been noted. Each respondent perceives differing values from their current employment, but it is the rarity, not the rule, that the source of income is also a career-related and valued job. Most students took whatever jobs were available, or they were continuing in jobs they had held for some time. Apart from apprentices, students in courses which had a 'practicum' or work-placement requirement at some stage saw this as enhancing their future 'employability'. Because of the opportunities respondents believe this experience might open up for them, the practicum is undoubtedly viewed by some as a 'career-related' component of the course. This was particularly apparent for the dance and theatre studies students in the Melbourne courses.

The implications for VET program design and delivery in the increasing trend for students to undertake their own study and work combinations.

Many of the students, particularly in response to the second semester questionnaire, were non-committal about possible institutional responses to their study and work commitments. Within the interview data there was also evidence that not many of them had either expected or received any institutional recognition of their own work initiatives. Most seemed to regard their choices about study and work combinations as an economic necessity, or something useful for future job applications, or proof of their personal initiative and dedication. Apart from the apprentices, and those in vocational courses with a practicum component, most seemed to perceive their courses as not intrinsically work-related.

In the interview and focus group data, there were also indications of disappointment and disillusionment at having to do it all for themselves, with no real recognition from either their colleges or their employers. Thus as one female student put it: "...it's like one of those... you know.... fun park horror halls... ...when you go in its all dark and there are lots of doors but you're not sure where they go... ... and they're all locked, and you need to know the passwords... but they're secret....and nobody will tell us what they are". A number of students talked about employers expecting them to be sitting by the phone during the day waiting for their call to come in and work. Some students had been knocked back because they did not have the relevant experience. About this one said "We are caught in a 'Catch 22' situation. We can't work during the day because of our course, but they (employers) expect us to have the experience. They have unrealistic expectations to expect us to have qualifications and experience".

The need to support study and work combinations was commented on: courses currently lead to qualifications, but qualifications are not leading to jobs, so governmental incentives for employers to take on youth in a paid format for work experience would, according to the students themselves, help a great deal.

When we turn to the local consultations with personnel from the VET institutions, it is difficult to summarise the responses on this issue. It would be fair to say that the consultations, on the whole, reveal a level of frustration with the current system, and a willingness to 'rethink' the role which VET might play in the future. However, while students' understandings of the relationship between employment and study have shifted, many TAFE staff continue to operate on the basis of outmoded conceptions. At each TAFE site an initial response to the issue of students' study and work combinations was to doubt whether student work commitments had any 'vocational' significance. On reflection, staff were willing to look at the implications of this, and in doing so made frequent reference to the problem created by structures which assumed that training existed for the 'job' rather than for 'work', with a resultant preoccupation with narrow 'competencies' rather than 'employment skills'. They suggested that it is this narrow conception of education and training that poses the greatest barrier to more fully recognising the wide range of employment experiences the students possess – a legacy of a previous era that needs to be abandoned, in the interests of both students and employers.

Final comment

It is clear that most students in this study see study and work combinations as an integral part of their adult lives. While income is still a major consideration in this, there is now an added rationale – the need to demonstrate, within the restructured labour market, work-preparedness, competencies, and work-experience as employment credentials. A minority identified a degree of difficulty associated with the balance, but most were managing it well. Apart from the apprentices, and those in vocational courses with a practicum component, most saw little relationship between their study and the types of job they had. Above all, they saw little indication that their employers were interested in their studies or that their training institutions were interested in their work. Some disappointment and disillusionment was expressed about having to do it all for themselves with no real recognition from either their colleges or their employers.

Current training arrangements still appear to be largely shaped by the 'norms' of the industrial era, premised on a linear transition 'from study to work', the identification of narrow 'job-specific skills', and (outside the apprenticeship system) an assumption that study and work are sequential rather than complementary elements of the training agenda. However, for the participants, and in response to new labour market conditions, the relationship between these elements has changed. The interface between study and work is now accepted by them as a 'fact of life', and integral to their preparation for the 'workforce of the future'. If this is the case, it suggests that the actual implementation of national training policy is lagging behind student assessments of market demands, and gives little recognition to the opportunities students are creating for themselves. Can we accept that these students are more in tune with the realities and needs of restructured labour markets, and more imaginative about constructing effective pathways into the future than existing training arrangements credit, recognise or allow?

If such recognition were to be given in the future, some practical attention would need to paid to developing formal arrangements that would

- articulate, within course arrangements and credits, modes of recognition of simultaneous work experience
- establish, between students' part-time local employers and their VET institutes, opportunities for formal industry partnerships
- give clearer recognition, within competency guidelines, to transferable 'employment skills' as an important complement to more narrowly defined 'job skills'

The actual form such developments would need to take will depend on the extent to which the interface between study and work is given its full recognition at a policy level. In general, therefore, the most fundamental finding and implication of this research is:

an urgent need to move VET policy beyond outmoded conceptions of a 'transition from study to work' and instead to reframe it in a way that takes full account of the simultaneous commitment to study and work combinations on the part of VET participants.

Appendix A: the first questionnaire

1. Are you:

male ❑ female ❑

2. What is your age?

under 18 ❑ 19 ❑ over 19 ❑

3. What type of school did you complete your schooling at?

government ❑ independent ❑

catholic ❑ other ❑

4. On leaving school what was your first preference for study?

University ❑ TAFE ❑ Other ❑

5. What is the main field of study for your current course? Mark ONE box health,

community services ❑ architecture, building ❑ education ❑

arts, social sciences ❑ business, economics ❑ veterinary etc ❑

engineering, surveying ❑ services,hospitality etc ❑ other ❑

6. In your final school year, did you have other work? Mark ALL that apply

before or after school ❑ during school holidays ❑ on weekends ❑

at irregular times ❑ no other work ❑

7. If you had other work, was it: a paid job ❑ unpaid ❑

8. If you had other work, on average how many hours a week did you work?

1 to 5 ❑ 10 to 15 ❑

6 to 9 ❑ over 15 ❑

9. Did you have trouble combining work and study? Mark ALL that apply

the work tended to take priority ❑

I needed the work but would have preferred not to ❑

I needed the work, but found it difficult to combine both ❑

I actually preferred to do both ❑

I'd prefer to work without having to study ❑

I'd prefer to study without having to work ❑

10. Do you expect trouble combining them during your current studies?

yes ❑ maybe ❑ no ❑ don't know ❑

11. What is your current situation regarding other work? Mark ONE box

I intend to get a job if I can ❑

I have a full-time job ❑

I have a regular part-time job ❑

I have a number of other jobs at present ❑

I have occasional employment ❑

I am not intending to get a job at this stage ❑

12. If you have other work, is it: a paid job ❑ unpaid ❑

13. Does this other work suit your field of study? Mark ONE box only

it is directly related to the type of course I am doing ❑

it has no real relationship with what I am studying ❑

it is somewhat related ❑

what I am studying is useful for the job ❑

my experiences at work are useful for my studies ❑

Appendix B: the second questionnaire

Section 1: Some general questions on background.

1. Are you 1. male ❑ 2. female ❑

2. What was your year of birth?

1977 or earlier ❑ 1978 ❑ 1979 ❑ 1980 ❑ 1981 or after ❑

3. Which category best describes the occupation of your male parent/guardian?

1. employed as qualified professional ❑
2. self-employed professional ❑
3. employed in management position ❑
4. manager of own business ❑
5. qualified tradesman ❑
6. employed as farmer ❑
7. manager of own farm ❑
8. Clerical/Office worker ❑
9. Salesman ❑
10 factory worker or labourer ❑
11 Other ❑

4. What was the highest education level of your female parent or guardian?

University degree ❑
Other Tertiary qualification ❑
Trade Certificate ❑
Year 12 ❑
Less than Year 12 ❑
Other ❑

5. In your last three years at school, where did you mostly live?

in a capital city ❑
in a large country town ❑
in a small country town ❑
in a mixture of the above ❑

Section 2: Some questions about work

6. Do any of the following apply to you? Mark ALL that apply

studying full-time ❑ studying part-time ❑ an apprentice ❑
still at school in 1997 ❑

7. Do you currently have a paid or unpaid job? Mark ALL that apply

a paid job ❑ a number of paid jobs ❑ one or more unpaid jobs ❑

8. If you have a job or jobs, how many hours work a week does it involve?

1 to 5 ❑ 10 to 15 ❑
6 to 9 ❑ over 15 ❑

9. Does this work suit your field of study? Mark ALL that apply

it is directly related to the type of course I am doing ❑
it has no real relationship with what I am studying ❑
it is somewhat related ❑
what I am studying is useful for the job ❑
my experiences at work are useful for my studies ❑

10. Do you have trouble combining this work and study? Mark ALL that apply

the work tends to take priority ❑
I need the work but would have preferred not to ❑
I need the work, but find it difficult to combine both ❑
I actually prefer to do both ❑
I'd prefer to work without having to study ❑
I'd prefer to study without having to work ❑

Section 3: Some questions about your studies

11. When did you first decide to choose a TAFE program? Mark ONE box only

in my last year at school ❑
on missing my other preferences after Yr 12 ❑
after a period of time in the workforce ❑
after completing another course elsewhere ❑
during another course elsewhere ❑
other ❑

12. How do you rank the following as reasons why you chose TAFE/VET?

	very high	high	medium	low
1. to gain an initial qualification	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑
2. to help me get a job	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑
3. for personal development	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑
4. to retrain for a different career	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑
5. as required by my employer	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑
6. other	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑

13 What is your opinion on these comments about your post-school study ?

	strongly disagree	disagree	no opinion	agree	strongly agree
1. useful for future employment	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
2. worth recommending to others	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
3. should be more practical	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
4. is my main priority at present	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
5. links well with the job I have	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
6. generally better than I'd expected	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
7. generally worse than I'd expected	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑

14. What is your opinion about combining study and other work?

	strongly disagree	disagree	no opinion	agree	strongly agree
1. studying makes it hard to cope with a job	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
2. working makes it hard to cope with study	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
3. our teachers mostly approve of students having jobs	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
4. timetables are flexible enough to also get a job	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
5. more courses should combine study and other work	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
6. the fact that some students have jobs shouldn't influence course content	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
7. in their courses most of our teachers make links between study and the jobs students have	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑
8. teachers should help us to get study-related jobs as part of our course	1 ❑	2 ❑	3 ❑	4 ❑	5 ❑

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